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SPORTING INTERLUDES  
AT GENEVA

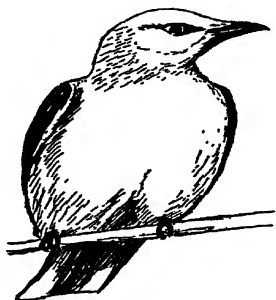
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# SPORTING INTERLUDES AT GENEVA

*by*

ANTHONY BUXTON



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*Dedicated  
to my Wife*



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## PREFACE

THE word Geneva in the title of this book, and my ill-deserved repute for indiscretion, may lead some of those interested in International affairs to search its pages for descriptions of celebrities drawn to Geneva since 1920 on the business of the League. They will search in vain. The chief characters are birds, beasts, and fishes, and human beings whatever their celebrity are relegated to an inferior position—the inside of a photographer's tent, the back of a hound-van, or the middle of a bog. The other sort of queer 'birds' or 'fish' may come later, but they are not coming now.

My grateful thanks are due to Mr. Ralph Chislett, first for starting me off on bird photography, and secondly for lending me one of his pictures of a greenshank; to M. Adolph Burdet whose example set me to filming, and one of whose portraits of a nuthatch appears in Chapter II; he has also provided two portraits of a certain 'Hubert' which will be found in Chapter V; to Mr. Sanasen, who has with infinite trouble furnished most of the illustrations for the chapters on beagling, fishing, and pig; and last but not least, to all those who have consciously or unconsciously, willingly or unwillingly, sat, flown, or stood for their portraits.

The illustrations are not evenly distributed; for instance, there are only four pages of photographs in Chapter II, which is comparatively long, whereas the chapters immediately following it are profusely illustrated. The reason is that Chapter II is supposed to be a general survey of Geneva's birds, and although I have had opportunities of meeting most of them, I have only had the time to photograph a very limited number, which have seemed to me the most interesting: these

## *Preface*

have chapters to themselves. Moreover, in Chapter II you are not supposed to look, you are supposed to read and occasionally even to think, whereas in the succeeding chapters you are supposed to look first and to read rather in search of explanation for what you see. You are, of course, perfectly at liberty not to read anything at all, but I do rather advise you to take an occasional look—in particular at the photographs I did not take myself, for instance those facing pages 50 and 57. Chapters IX, X and XI have been included rather as an afterthought to catch the people who like beasts and fishes better than birds, and like catching them too. Nobody need be frightened that I shall make them jealous by catching too many.

Contrary to the popular belief, a League official is a busy man or woman : leisure hours are short and business hours are long. Therefore the sport I enjoyed with rod, rifle, or camera, was crammed into the corners of my Geneva life, into the hours before breakfast, about sunset, or at the short week-end. That did not detract from the pleasure ; it increased it.

The last eleven years at Geneva have been a very happy time for me. The sum of that happiness is due to many causes—one of them association with its pig, its fish, its foxes, and its varied wealth of birds. The object of this book is to pass on, if I can, some of the pleasure derived from their acquaintance. I trust that the first part of it may appeal both to those who know little of birds and would like to know more, and to those who know much but have realized, as indeed they must, that there is always something new to learn ; the second part may find an echo among those whose fingers itch for the feel of rod or rifle, or whose ears tingle at the sound of hound or horn.

A. B.

# BIRDS

## GENERAL REFLECTIONS

**M**Y INTEREST in birds started at an early age before school days, when I was allowed to take one egg of each sort from the nests found ; I have long ceased to take even one egg, and dislike even touching them. The discovery that knowledge of notes was essential to the detection of any covert loving bird was made at about the age of ten, and between then and eighteen I went through the laborious business of picking out the various sounds myself by stalking and watching, and later by identifying their producers from a book. It was a slow process, but far more effective than the lazier method of getting someone else to teach me, and once the commoner notes were fixed in the memory new sounds were caught more easily and recorded in the mind. I look back on those earlier stages of note learning as some of the hardest work I ever did—and the best repaid, for it is a boon to be able to stand outside and within earshot of covert and say what bird it contains, instead of having to plough through it in the hope of a glimpse of its inhabitants. Nowadays I believe that any bird sound new to me would arrest my ear, whatever I was doing at the moment.

The best pair of ears for birds that are known to me belong to my friend, Mr. W. S. Medlicott, and I owe much to his inspiration and uncanny knack of picking strange notes out of a mixed chorus. One of his most remarkable feats was performed for our mutual benefit on the sands of Dungeness. We had toiled through the morning of a broiling day examining countless ringed plovers to see if any of them

## *Birds*

would turn themselves into the Kentish, that neither of us had ever seen. We were walking some distance apart, when he stopped and listened before whistling to me ; he had heard far off a little sound that seemed unfamiliar, and when we walked in its direction there at last were our first pair of Kentish plover running about on the shingle. We sat down together, and I remember the difficulty in that heat haze of keeping the tiny racing figures in the field of the telescope, until at last the hen settled comfortably on her half-buried eggs by the side of a single yellow flower that made marking the spot easy in such a wilderness. The good authorities of Dungeness need have no fear ; we looked but we did not touch. The credit for that find goes straight to Mr. Medicott's ears, and the incident has, I think, sharpened mine ever since.

To insure really intimate acquaintance with the family life of a bird, the first essential is to find its nest. Fortunately for the busy man, one hour before breakfast is for nest-finding worth all the rest of the day, for most birds are early risers and early workers, but adopt the excellent rule of a half-holiday every day of the week except when there are babies to feed. In my opinion the most important qualification for finding a nest by the scientific and satisfactory method of getting its owner to disclose its position is the capacity to sit still. Hours and even days can be wasted by changing position for a better view, or by jumping to conclusions on insufficient evidence. Every time a move is made suspicion is aroused, and it seems better to remain in the same position until there is real evidence (such as building material carried in the bill) that a nest is in a certain spot, or at least on a certain line. Whacking about with a stick in thick covert is, no doubt, a useful if unscientific method of putting up a tight-sitting bird, but the real cream of the business is that view through the telescope after hours of watching when the suspicious old lady at last plucks up her courage, glides through the air straight for her home, or lowers her head, hunches her shoulders, and slinks along

through the grass to settle with a pleasing scratch of the leg and shuffle of the breast-feathers on to her eggs.

For that senseless nuisance, the egg-clutcher, this ends the business ; he has only to walk up and steal, but for the bird photographer it is but the first stage in a very long business. It gives him his focussing point, but to reach it with his tent, that is to hide him and his camera, requires much time and patience. If he makes a single false step, if he disturbs or even unduly offends his subject, he is doomed to failure, for his bait is either the undisturbed eggs on which the hen must brood or—and far more often—the young themselves, to which the parents must return with food. The healthier the babies and the better their appetites, the more frequent will be the photographer's chances. It pays him therefore to behave in a seemly manner to his subjects. The parents must be rendered either totally unconscious of his presence or totally indifferent to it ; they must get so used to the tent at a distance that they look upon it as a harmless part of the landscape, and once that state of mind has been acquired, the tent must be moved up day by day, or if the birds seem nervous at longer intervals, till it reaches the desired position. Slowness of approach is the essence of success.

Geneva is an ideal place for studying the habits of birds at the moment when they cease their journey and settle down to nest. There seems to be a general rule, with of course many exceptions, that on the northern journey cocks shall precede hens by a week or ten days ; that rule applies for instance to orioles, hoopoes, thrushes, migratory shrikes, woodlarks, redstarts, chaffinches, serins, and all the warblers. Some exceptions—cocks and hens arriving at nesting sites together—seem to be buzzards, certainly pied and possibly spotted flycatchers, goldfinches, hawfinches, ducks, waders, and pigeons.

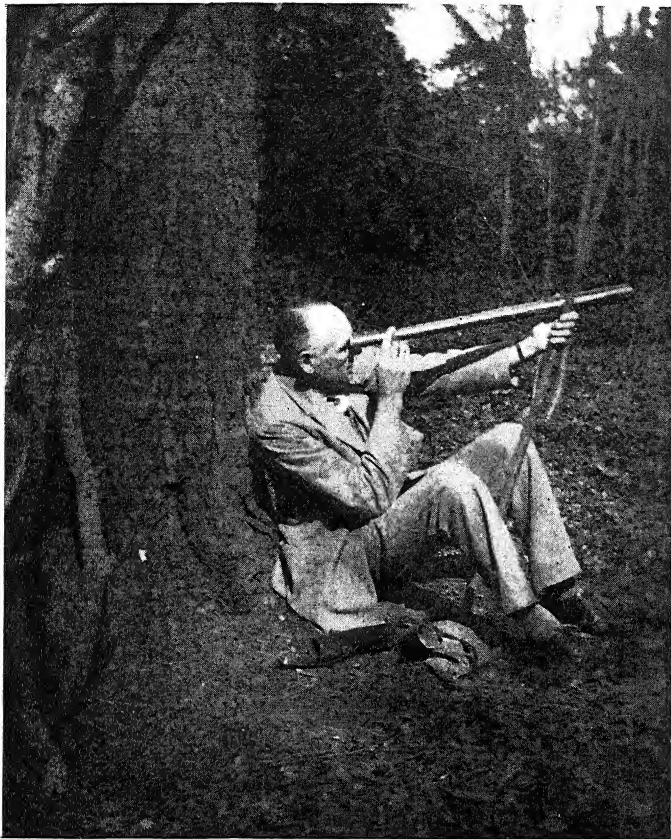
My experience leads me to believe that there are regular routes along which the main body of any particular species travels, and that from



## *Birds*

those routes individuals turn off to their particular nesting sites, occupy a territory or property, and, unless they nest in colonies, defend it against all comers of the same kind. During a week early in March at Geneva for instance a steady dribble of cock chiffchaffs would be seen working their way slowly north up a stream, catching the flies as they went squealing a little, and if the sun came out singing their monotonous little song. In the nesting sites away from the river there would for the moment be no chiffchaffs, but presently there would be a few noisy and demonstrative cocks, and later again the first hens would have joined them and be squealing plaintively as they searched for a suitable nesting site. Much the same process is followed by nightingales and wood-wrens, except that in their case the general migration routes seem to run through the nesting sites and not necessarily up a river, thereby causing a great deal of disturbance and quarrelling among the cocks, which have already occupied their properties and are constantly urging the crowd of travellers to move on. On the other hand with birds like goldfinches, a flock arrives in a district apparently made up of cocks and hens in more or less equal numbers, and then in a few days breaks up into pairs, which come into the gardens and at once start nesting as near human company as possible.

In the case of most kinds of birds there is at Geneva, and no doubt elsewhere, a noticeable variation in quantity year by year; the numbers increase to a peak, then there is a sharp fall and slow recovery. This was very marked in the case of that quaint little finch, the serin; some four or five years ago there were at least six pairs of serins which nested within a hundred yards of my house; then came a year with only one pair, and the subsequent increase was very slow. 1930 was an amazing season for goldfinches, whereas in 1931 they were reduced from something like ten to one. In 1931 there was an invasion of honey buzzards, which increased from perhaps two pairs in a large district to about ten



I. MR. W. S. MEDLICOTT SPYING

2. CREES, LADDER AND HIDE  
AT HONEY BUZZARD'S NEST





3 and 4. GOLDFINCH

pairs. To a great or less degree these variations were almost general, but a few birds during the last eleven years seemed to have escaped catastrophe ; there was always, for instance, a large and permanent population of nuthatches and great tits inhabiting just the same places in just the same numbers. We know little about birds' epidemics except those that attack a few species such as grouse and partridges, in whose numbers many people are interested, but I imagine that, like them, every kind of bird is subject to some devastating disease which at intervals decimates its numbers, and that these are gradually increased until the epidemic claims its victims once again. No doubt weather conditions, such as storms during migration, severe winters, wet or drought at hatching, destruction by human beings or other agents, etc., play their part, but I believe the main restrictive factor is disease, and that the phenomenon of the lemmings, with their periodic increase migration and destruction mainly by disease at fairly regular intervals, is repeated in less obvious form among the birds. Whatever the cause, every season at Geneva might have been described as a bumper year for one bird and the reverse for another. However great the losses of any particular species in a given year, the volume of the spring chorus at Geneva never seemed to diminish ; year after year one could marvel at that bewildering mass of sound.

I do not know whether my theory of the meaning of bird song agrees with that of more scientific authorities. Some of us would perhaps like to believe that the song of a bird is simply an expression of its joy in life on a fine spring morning. Probably its feelings on that subject are very much the same as ours, and most birds certainly sing better and for longer periods in fine weather, but I think song has a far more definite purpose than the expression of pleasure in life. The nearest analogy that comes to my mind is the roar of a red stag or the bark of a dog fox ; it is the assertion incited by sexual changes of rights

## *Birds*

by the male over a certain area, and over a female or females of its kind, whether present at the moment or not ; indeed, with those birds whose cocks arrive first, song is most sustained before the hens appear. Two or three years ago I became very well acquainted with two cock nightingales who occupied adjoining areas in a ravine : I knew the dates of their arrival and watched them nearly every morning. Song was almost continuous in the mornings, and if one bird approached the boundary between their properties the other would at once retaliate by flying towards it, singing loudly and sometimes croaking in between the musical notes. Then one morning that plaintive squealing began—sure sign that a mate for one of the cocks had arrived. The singing of the cock with a mate continued, but it was less sustained and more in snatches ; sometimes he would sing a bar or two when actually carrying oak leaves to the nest, but for the most part he would either squeal or be silent while at work, croak when his temper was upset, and whistle at intervals, particularly in answer to the neighbouring cock. In addition to using his song as an assertion of rights, I imagine that a cock bird's intensive noisiness on first arrival is intended to insure that the expected hen shall not miss him when she reaches the district ; he uses his voice in fact as a harbour light. Every bird photographer must have suffered from tragedies to his subjects owing to his own carelessness or to other causes, and in my experience the first warning of such a tragedy is a fresh outburst of extravagant singing by the cock : the sucking of its eggs or the murder of its infants are announced by what sounds like a peal of joy. That is due, I imagine, to the reawakening of the desire to reproduce its kind.

The fastest builders known to me among birds that make a carefully constructed nest are robins and nightingales. Nightingales will build a nest in a day and the hen will lay her first egg the next day, but a robin can beat even that. A workman left his coat on the ground in a wood at 9 a.m., and when he went to pick it up at 12 p.m., three hours later,

there was a robin's nest, apparently finished, tucked into the fold at the junction of the sleeve. Of other birds, orioles take normally about ten days, tits that breed in holes about a week, long-tailed tits at least a fortnight and sometimes longer, wood-wrens about four days, blackcaps five or six days, firecrests about ten days, chaffinches and goldfinches about a week, wood-pigeons a full week, although I am sure I could do the job myself before luncheon.

The reaction of birds to photography seems to depend on the character of the individual and not on that of the species, so that it is incorrect to talk of a wild or a tame sort of bird in this respect. Both individuals of a pair may be tame and tractable, both may be the reverse, but as often as not they show a marked difference in temperament ; either the cock or the hen will be suspicious, jumpy, or ill-tempered, while its mate will be a paragon of all the virtues that constitute a good sitter. In time the wildest bird can, I believe, be trained into indifference to any object however strange, and to all the mysterious sounds involved in photography. It is obvious too that birds recognize individuals, or at least their clothes, and will in the end get used to the same person working upon or returning constantly to a hide. I have made little attempt to camouflage my hides ; they have to be so large and so close to the nests that any attempt at their concealment must involve much labour and probably fail to deceive ; moreover sticks, grass and other coverings are liable to blow over the front of the lens at the critical moment. Therefore it seems to me best to make no attempt to conceal the hide, and to rely on moving it by easy stages from a considerable distance to close range, with some rough imitation of the lens left for a day or two in position before photography begins. We once put a loud ticking clock in a hide before filming, but whether it did any good is a matter of conjecture, for the hen (a hoopoe) was so indifferent to any noise that she soon shamed her husband out of his fit of nerves when

## *Birds*

the film started, and would, I am sure, have done so even if she had not first got used to the clock.

It is essential that I should say a word about my companion in photography, Mr. George Crees, who, apart from being a chauffeur, whip and kennel huntsman to the Geneva beagles, has done most of the preparatory work required for the taking of these bird illustrations, and has actually taken quite as many, if not more, of them than I. Without his keenness, ingenuity and determination, many of them would never have been taken at all ; and while I can claim the largest share of pure black or pure white negatives, he wins easily in those that are fit to reproduce.

Most of my work with birds, if it can be called work, has been done before breakfast with the office looming inconveniently close. Frequenters of the roads and lanes about Geneva must have wondered at the doings of two individuals on summer mornings—wriggling in frantic haste from knickerbockers into trousers, tying their ties and brushing their hair with battered mudguard of an ancient Ford for mirror, packing mysterious cases into the car, roping to the foot-board a tent and ladder, gulping down a cup of coffee, munching at a sandwich. How often have I cursed the League of Nations when after hours of fruitless watching for some special bird, or waiting for a better light, the creature has arrived, the sun has broken through the mist, and it is nine o'clock and time to hurry to the office, just a little late, more than a little hot, and in a temper fit to crack the telephone. Nevertheless this strange division of the day, the excitement as to whether there would be time to see or photograph the bird before official hours, the fight with conscience over the moment to pack up : all added a sort of fillip to the sport. When, after countless failures due to lack of time or far more often lack of common sense, the cautious hen for once forgot herself and led the watcher to the nest, or a negative came back with something on

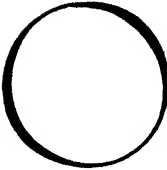
it that could with reason be referred to as a bird, success was all the sweeter, and one realized that the proper sphere of recreation is a counterpart to work.

When these photographs were taken I had no telescopic lens, and most of them were obtained at a distance of three feet ; none of them at more than ten feet. Much, no doubt, may be said for telescopic work, but there is to me an enormous attraction in being so close that the bird is in reach of an outstretched hand. It is a thrilling experience to be within touching distance of a wild creature viewed through a peep-hole in the canvas, as it goes about its household duties unconscious, unafraid. It may be after hours of waiting in a cramped position and bitten by insects there comes at last that brushing in the grass or swish of wings that shoots the finger to the camera release. All the discomfort is forgotten ; there is the real live bird appearing about ten times its proper size, an enormous eye looking straight at yours, every line and every feather clear at last. You may have forgotten to take out the blind slide, the bird may (it generally does) move at the critical moment or perch just out of focus, the light may be wrong or you may be wrong about the light, but at least you have seen a sight vouchsafed to few. You may get no picture on the plate or film, but you have a picture in your head that you will not forget, and barring accidents you will learn more about the intimate life of that bird than can be learnt in any other way ; and even if you are as big a fool as I with a camera, one day by some unholy fluke the likeness of the creature will implant itself on the sensitive part of your plate : you will have something to show your friends. To me the photographs are just pages out of a game book that bring back vivid memories of the things one really saw—brilliant flashes of colour, the poise of a lighting bird, its expression and the way it fed its young. They may give pleasure or arouse interest in others, but the sensations they recall are the photographer's, and his alone.



## Chapter II

# GENEVA'S BIRDS

 OF ALL the places in which I have lived, Geneva, for quantity and variety of bird-life, stands at the very top of the tree. The plain in which it lies is on one of the great migration routes from south to north, or in the reverse direction, and a map will show that for a bird that winters in Africa and summers in Europe there is no better line than up the Rhone valley to the Lake of Geneva, north over the gently rolling plateau to the Lake of Neuchatel, and thence on to the Rhine. The Alps, as you come north through Switzerland, line the eastern horizon, and the Jura the western, as it were to keep you on your course. There are no high obstacles to bar the route, there is water all the way, pleasant woods for those who like covert, great open spaces for those who shun it, a hatch of fly on lake or river for the swallows and the warblers, good walking for the quails, good dibbling for the ducks, good probing for the waders, a line of fir forest for the crossbills, a line of high downs for the wheatears and the ring ousels. In addition to being on a favoured route, the plain of Geneva, and also the mountains that bound it, are a prolific breeding-ground for birds ; millions pass, but thousands stay and spend the summer. So far as man is concerned they spend it undisturbed, for all shooting stops in Switzerland before the first spring birds arrive ; and though it continues in France until the end of March, the only spring migrants that suffer are a few of the earlier duck, thrushes and an occasional wader or plover. There are no game-keepers to slaughter birds of prey ; there are, so far as my experience goes, no egg-clutchers, and above all there is a lively interest in birds and a high standard of knowledge both in Switzerland and in the neighbour-

## *Geneva's Birds*

ing parts of France. In eleven years at Geneva the nests that I have found must mount up to many hundreds, yet in no case have I proved or even suspected wanton destruction or disturbance by a human being. Whether this excellent behaviour towards the birds is due to teaching in the schools, to wise and simple legislation, or to a love of nature instinctive in the people, the result is that in the summer the whole country is a natural reserve. Switzerland is above all a democratic country : so long as you do no harm to crops you can wander where you will, except in private gardens. Woods and fields are full of people out to enjoy the country, pick the flowers, find the mushrooms, catch the trout, but except for the short shooting season, when birds and beasts must take their chance, wild life is not molested. Of course there is destruction, and on an enormous scale, but its agents are magpies, carrion crows, cats, pine martens, hedgehogs and all the other creatures with a passion for tender meat or fresh eggs.

The climate of Geneva does not differ to any great extent from that of Southern England ; the winter is perhaps a little harder, the spring later and quicker, and the sun stronger, but for some reason there is far more difference between the winter and the summer bird population in Geneva than in England. The number of birds that come or stop in the winter in Switzerland is much smaller than in England ; none of the starlings, thrushes or wood-pigeons for instance remain, few of the red-wings or fieldfares come except in very hard weather ; the exodus in autumn is almost general, the influx in spring is on a scale that I have never seen elsewhere.

I kept an accurate diary of all spring arrivals each year at Geneva, though not, I fear, of the autumn departures. That diary shows amazing regularity in date of arrivals from year to year, and in many cases it would almost seem as if the birds kept a calendar themselves and arranged their journey accordingly—‘ first cock oriole to arrive at

## *Geneva's Birds*

Geneva on April 28, first hen ten days later,' etc. The dates of arrival at Geneva, compared with the dates of arrival of the same species in England, seem to show that it takes about ten days to a fortnight for a small bird like a warbler to cover that distance. This may sound very slow, but it tallies with my observations of individual migrants quietly working their way up a stream or flitting from one group of trees to another with a pause at each. No doubt birds with very strong flight, like swallows, ducks and waders, when they are on the move, plug along pretty fast, but they too often make long pauses for food in between their travelling stages.

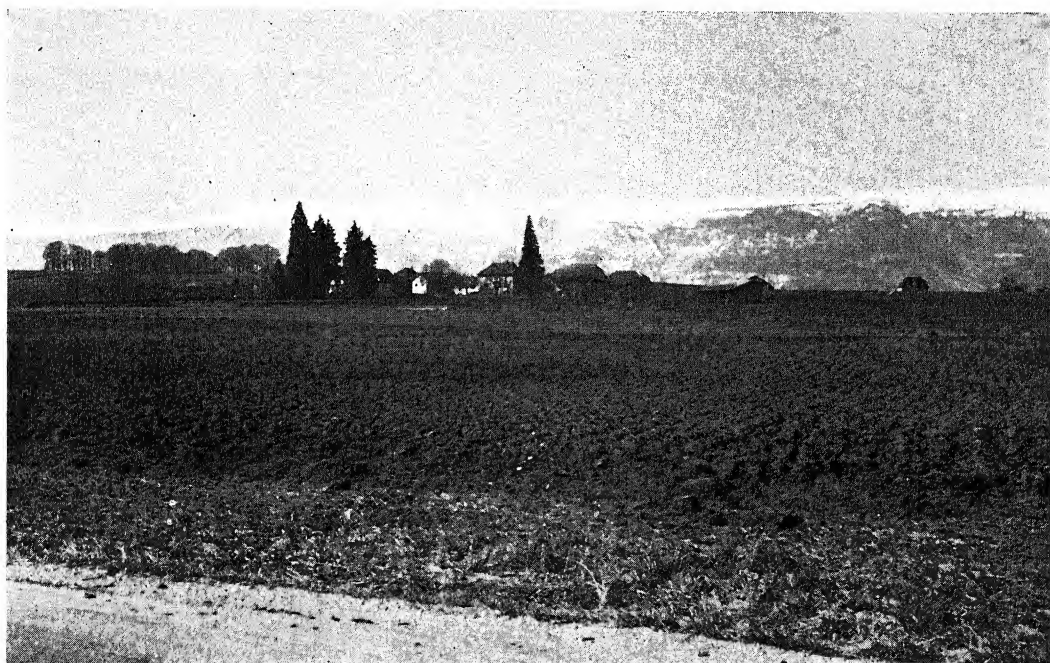
Anyone who talks about Geneva's birds must start with a nuthatch. The League of Nations Office boasts a pair of nuthatches of its own (so does the International Labour Office), which live not in the garden but in the trees lining the street opposite the front door, and our cock nuthatch used to announce the arrival of the delegates for the January meeting of the Council by at once whistling for his dog. Other nuthatches in the town and outside it all seemed to have lost their dogs at the same moment and to have found their little treble motor sirens: no nuthatch can remain silent at any time of year, except perhaps the late summer, but the amount of fuss and noise that they cram into the day from January till April constitutes a record among all the birds I know. Like a nightingale and other songsters a nuthatch whistles definitely *at* another nuthatch, and is noisiest during the period before nesting actually begins. As with many other birds his intensive noisiness is accompanied by a special spring flight, which is a sort of blustering, swaying swagger through the air.

We were never without nuthatches at our bird table, for they are the most stay at home of all birds; and they were the quickest tempered and the worst behaved of those that came to us for a meal. Geneva nuthatches do not seem to have such strong bills as English ones, for they



*M. Sanasen*

5. THE ALPS AND MONT BLANC LINE THE EASTERN HORIZON



*M. Sanasen*

6. AND THE JURA LINE THE WESTERN



*Adolphe Burdet*

7. NUTHATCH



8. NEST OF FIRECREST

could seldom crack a hazel nut unaided. It was my object to induce at least one pair to nest each year in a bird box, but we were not invariably successful. Boxes used to be carried about the garden in February after the nuthatches and erected wherever they were noisiest. The boxes were generally inspected at once by these birds and also by all the tits, but a nuthatch seems very particular, especially about the aperture and the exact fitting of the lid. One nuthatch of my acquaintance showed intense pertinacity about its building site in a hole in a cherry tree under my window. I was determined to get him into a box which was fixed just below the hole he had selected, the latter being blocked with a board nailed to the tree. For the next week the bird hammered away at the board till it was penetrated and the hole reopened : I re-stopped it and the same process was repeated until it was again reopened ; then a starling chipped in, and in admiration of my nuthatch's patience I at last stood aside to let them fight it out. For a time both birds entered the hole in turn, but the nuthatch had another trick up his sleeve—he gradually filled in the sides of the hole with mud until its circumference was too small for the starling, and safely installed himself in his chosen site with the empty box below him. One of the advantages of letting a nesting box to a nuthatch is that you can take off the lid and see how the birds fix the mortar and also how they arrange the lining of bark chips. The Geneva nuthatches seemed to have just as much objection to a ' current of air ' as the Geneva inhabitants, for they were most particular to place a roof of mortar all the way round under the lid of the box, as well as round the sides of the entrance hole : they used to work hardest at the mortaring business after a shower of rain, collecting the mud from the edges of puddles on the paths. The chips, which seemed to be all taken from the bark of Scotch fir, were arranged symmetrically in layers round the cylindrical box, in the opposite way to biscuits in a tin—flat sides towards the cup containing the eggs. I

## *Geneva's Birds*

imagine the first layer was packed tight all round the walls of the box and other layers added on the inside and then pressed outwards by the bird turning round in the centre, until sufficient layers had been added to make the correct sized cup for the eggs.

A nuthatch is happy in any position assumed by a gymnast, but it seems to prefer to be perpendicular the wrong way up, that is with its head towards the ground. When running about on a tree trunk it gives the impression that it has been wound up like the toys that are jerked about the pavement outside Liverpool Street Station at Christmas time, but its machinery never seems to run down from one end of the day to the other. I cannot remember ever to have seen a nuthatch remaining still for five minutes at a time : if not hammering a nut or chiselling at a bit of bark it is twisting its head round, poking its nose at anything and everything, and running with that absurd series of jerks up and down the tree or round and round a branch. There is something about a nuthatch that always makes me laugh, and though from the point of view of morals I should rate him very low, particularly in the matter of temper, fuss and manners, I like the tilt of his nose, his chopped-off tail, his mechanical jerks and his ringing whistle that proclaims the spring long before it has arrived or anything else has even begun to think about it. Whether you like him or not you cannot get along without him at Geneva, for he is ubiquitous, both in the town and outside it.

My office window looked out over the League garden, of perhaps a hundred yards by forty, to the lake, and beyond it to the Alps with Mont Blanc in the background—by no means a bad aspect for business premises. I have not kept a full list of all the birds heard or seen from that office, but it would include mallard, pochard, tufted duck, coot, dabchick, curlew, greenshank, magpie, carrion crow, black kite, black-cap, whitethroat, garden warbler, nightingale, chiffchaff, sparrow, green-



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finch, chaffinch, goldfinch, hawfinch, serin, wryneck, blackbird, great tit (a pair nested every year without a break, within a foot of the window), blue tit, cole tit, marsh tit, tree creeper, swift, swallow, house martin, sand martin, common redstart, black redstart, robin, firecrest, goldcrest, and of course the nuthatch, who occasionally condescended to leave his post of vantage at the front door and come round to my side of the building. The most disconcerting were the blackcaps and the green-shanks, for it is very difficult to attend strictly to business when a cock blackcap is bursting from that exciting little whisper into a full-throated crescendo within a few feet of your window and I never could resist talking to the greenshanks as they passed down the lake in August and September, for the greenshank is one of the few birds that is polite enough to answer my remarks. A good deal of time that might have been better spent was also employed in trying to spot the exact branch of a large tree in which the firecrests nested almost every season. There was never any doubt about the right tree but there was a great deal of doubt about the right branch.

The firecrest takes the place of the goldcrest at Geneva and is much the commoner bird of the two in the spring. A fair quantity of goldcrests go through in March, succeeded by a mass of firecrests at the end of that month, many of which remain to breed ; indeed, it is true to say of Geneva that wherever two or three spruces are gathered together there will be a pair of firecrests : in the property where I lived there were in a good year about fifteen pairs and generally one pair of goldcrests as well. Lord Grey gives a most satisfying description of a goldcrest's song, as ' a tiny stream trickling and rippling over a small pebbly channel, and at the end going over a miniature cascade ' : with a firecrest there is the same tiny stream, but it just trickles and ripples on and there is no cascade. I have taken a number of photographs of firecrests, but owing to their minuteness, to the hanging fronds of the spruce, and to their



## *Geneva's Birds*

habit of creeping on to the nest under the bough and hidden by these fronds, no success in portraits has come my way. The labour, however, was well repaid, for they are delightful little things and very tame. It was to be expected that they would feed their miniature babies on tiny insects, but the flies they brought in their beaks were large enough to completely cover their faces. Unless the birds are excited, the two black lines above the eyes entirely hide the gold band which seems to lie in a groove except for a short length of yellow that shows behind the ends of the black bands at the back of their heads, but when a cock firecrest sees a rival or wishes to give real pleasure to his wife, he erects his crest and gives a magnificent display of fireworks on his forehead. It may sound unpatriotic for an Englishman to say so, but to my eyes the firecrest is a much smarter bird, with his black and white face markings and richer coloured top-knot, than our goldcrest. Looking for his nest is liable to cause a crick in the neck, for he has acquired the knack of choosing a bough unnecessarily near the top of a tree. The poor little wretches have a terrible time at Geneva from the magpies, and I believe also from the pine martens, for their nests are always being torn to pieces by these baby snatchers just at hatching time. On a number of occasions I have seen firecrests engaged on the very earliest building operations. The first stage consists in hanging a circular purse of spiders' webs to the under side of the bough: when this little purse is complete and firmly attached to the bough and its fronds, it is filled with moss, and finally feathers in incredible numbers. Most of the nests are in spruce, but I have seen a few in the ivy on an oak stem.

To anyone who is fond of warblers I can recommend Geneva, for in addition to all our common British species, except the sedge, which seems only to pass in the autumn, and the lesser whitethroat, which is very rare, he can amuse himself with the icterine, the great reed, and in a few selected spots, which look to me just like the surrounding country, that

pleasant little songster the marsh warbler. Since the icterine is my favourite warbler some description of him shall be given.

We first met at Ypres, and in the following manner. My quarters were in a large cellar in the ramparts facing the 'Ecole de Bienfaisance,' and on the outer side was a sand-bagged exit to the moat surrounding the ramparts at a point where a small area of dry land covered with bushes and fringed with reeds jutted into the water. This little spit of land was pockmarked with shell-holes, but it was full of birds, which could be watched either from the sand-bags or, better, if there were no shells falling, from the top of the ramparts. Nesting on this tiny area were two pairs of reed warblers, a pair of blackcaps (whose first nest had been blown sideways by a shell and whose second nest contained, perhaps owing to shell-shock, pure white eggs instead of those of the usual rich brown), a pair of garden warblers, numbers of greenfinches, a pair of bluetits and in addition a songster I had never heard before. He was a very persistent singer and easy to watch, for he sang high up in open spaces in the trees, and I remembered his portrait in Dresser's *Birds of Europe* but could not remember his name; this was only discovered to be the icterine when I returned on leave.

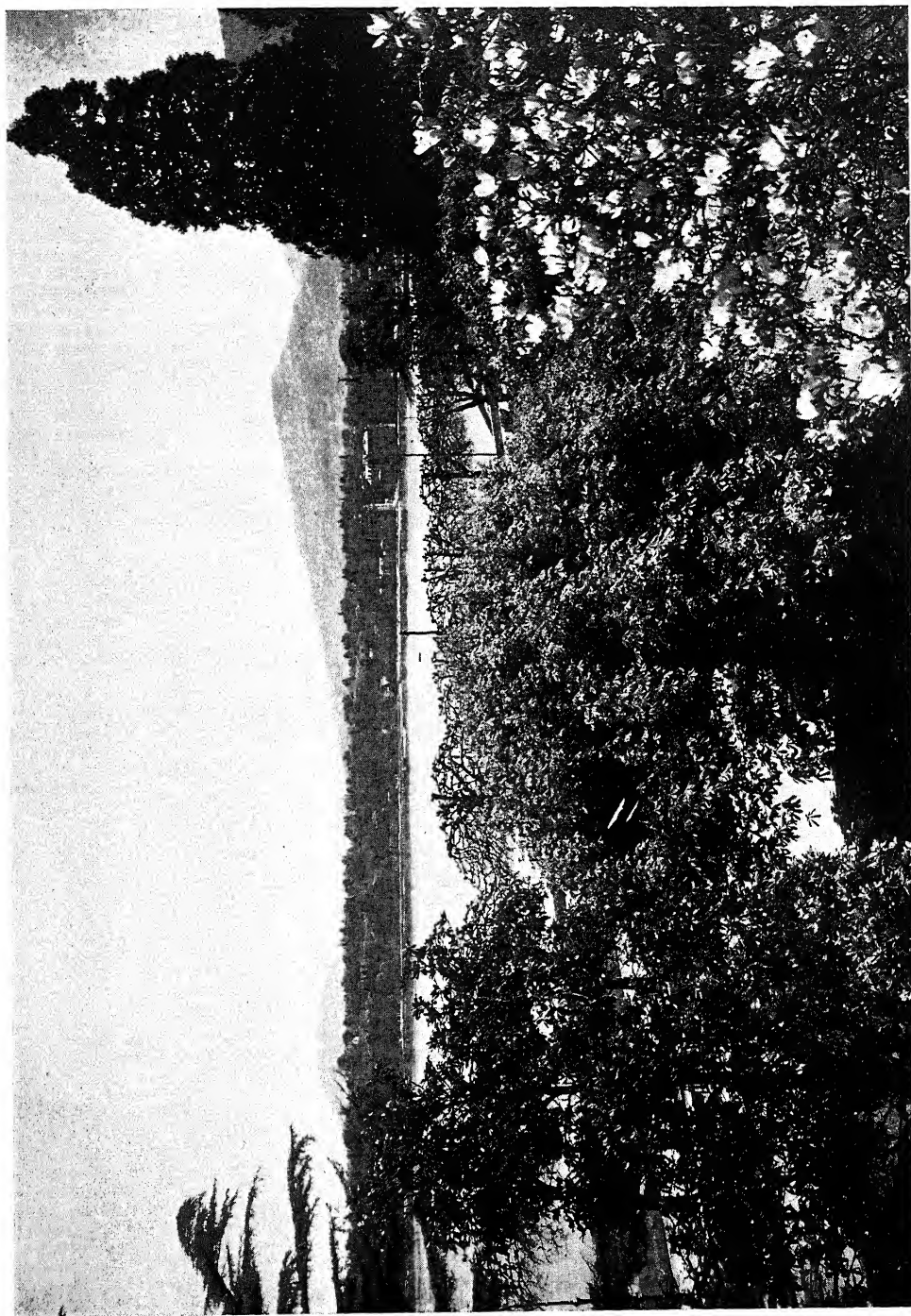
The song of an icterine shows some connection with that of a sedge warbler, but in appearance and habits he is closer to a wood-wren, so that I was doubtful whether the nest would be above the ground or on it, and for a day or two no hen appeared. Nevertheless the songster behaved as if he had a wife and at last, by making him lose his temper and appeal for help to her, a glimpse was obtained of her slinking about in a bush, and the nest was found with its owner sitting on it. I learnt from behind the sand-bags that neither she nor the reed warblers ever ducked their heads or flinched during a bombardment; they sat absolutely still without even winking an eye, with shells falling and whistling all round them.

## *Geneva's Birds*

There is no better warbler nest than an icterine's, and no better warbler eggs. The nest is in the style of a sedge or reed warbler's, shaped like one of the cups that other people win at athletic sports, and made of a beautiful silvery grey material. I am told that in Sweden the icterines use bark from the silver birch, but there were no silver birches at Ypres and there are very few at Geneva, so that in those places other material of the same colour is used. The nest is usually placed at five to ten feet from the ground, and in a fork with the boughs pointing at a sharp angle upwards. The eggs are an uncommon colour for a warbler, and a pretty colour to lie in a pale grey nest—pink with dark brown spots.

Like a Dartford warbler an icterine always has a cheeky look about him owing to his high forehead, and he is, in fact, a distinctly cheeky bird, climbing from the undergrowth up to a coign of vantage and suddenly letting out his alarm note in your face. There is a sort of nasal twang at the end of this call, and this, together with the challenging tone the bird puts into the little phrase, tchit-tchee *weeuck*, tchit-tchee *wang*, is calculated to make the intruder jump. I have seen the icterine described as a good singer—even as a rival of a nightingale. I should call him as bad a singer as ever sang ; he is a comic artist of the most vulgar type, with admittedly a good note occasionally inserted in the midst of the quaintest patter of conversation intermingled with squeaks and guttural sounds. It is more like a violin played very fast and hopelessly out of tune, but there is humour in it, and most warblers are lacking in that quality. The bird is a pleasant enough colour of green above and pale yellow below, and thanks to his habit of singing high up on a bare perch he is much more easy to see than most warblers.

There were quite a lot of icterines in the War area in Northern France, and though not so generally distributed in the Canton of Geneva there are plenty of them if you know where to look. They are

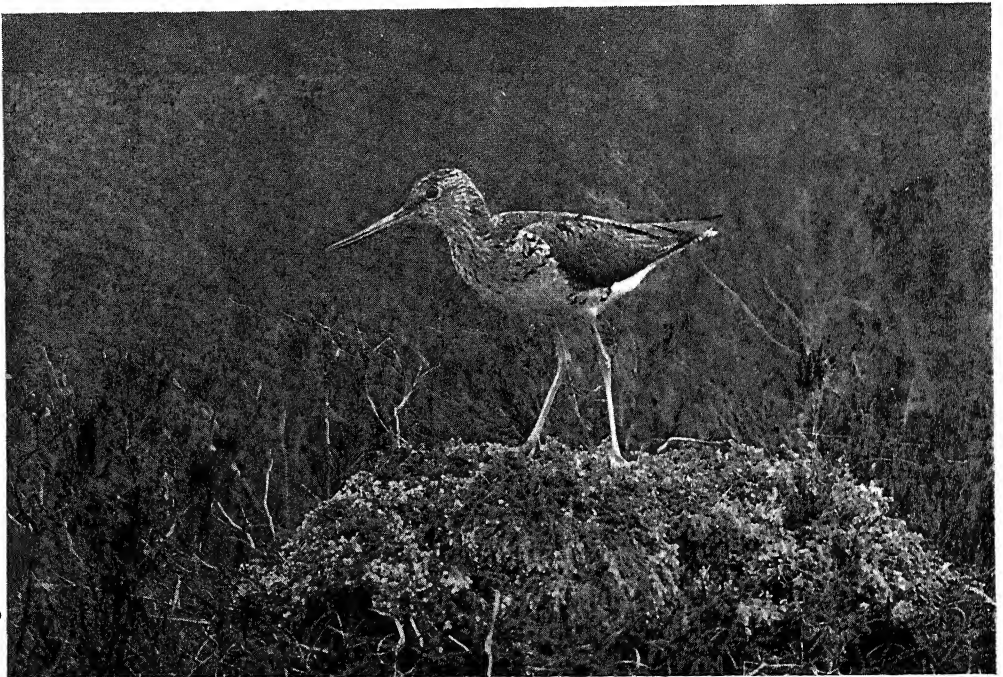


*M. Sanasen*

9. VIEW FROM MY OFFICE WINDOW



10. ICTERINE WARBLER



*Ralph Chislett*

11. GREENSHANK

## *Geneva's Birds*

very thick on the ground in the scrub covering the bottom of the valley of the London stream that runs into the Rhone, and also in certain other spots, including a gully near my house, which has a pleasant place in my memory, for in the spinney at the top of it the lady who is now my wife wiped my eye over a nightingale's nest.

The cock icterines arrive at Geneva in the first week of May and the hens about ten days later, when nesting begins at once. I looked upon it as one of my duties to find at least one icterine's nest in this gully every year, and a painful duty it was, for the low covert in which they built was one of the thorniest jungles I ever penetrated. The best plan was to sit on the opposite bank where the timber was high and thence command at least the upper twigs of the jungle. Icterines being excessively talkative even when building, it was usually possible to get a fair idea of the position of the nest by ear, and occasional glimpses of the birds could then be obtained on their way to and from the nest, but it was a great mistake to enter the jungle before the nest had been exactly located from a distance, for once in its depths it was impossible to see five yards ahead.

In the case of the pair whose portraits are reproduced, the bushes were so thick that it was difficult without much cutting to get the hide right up to the nest. The camera was therefore placed on a stand at three feet distance, and operated with a spring release from a hide in an open space some ten yards away. This involved resetting the camera after every photograph, and I sat tight in the hide with an elementary telephone in the shape of a string attached to Crees. When the string was jerked Crees moved up to make the camera ready for the next shot, but the birds took so little notice and visited the nest so often that for half an hour he was kept in almost continuous motion : they were often in with their food for the babies before he could get back to his hiding place.

## *Geneva's Birds*

Since icterines are to be found in Northern France, Belgium, Holland and even Sweden, it is strange that they do not visit England. This can hardly be due to lack of suitable sites, for they often inhabit rough fences and other low covert: I imagine that some special food which they require is absent. Once or twice at Geneva I came across their very near relation, the melodious warbler, but never found a nest, and the individuals seen always appeared to be single and travelling cocks. They look so much like icterines that I should certainly not have recognized them except by the difference in song, and even that bears a strong family resemblance.

Wood-wrens were extremely common, especially in the wood overhanging the Rhone near my house, which looked as if it had been made for them—a bank with tall trees, mainly beech and oak, with very little undergrowth. They were easy to watch, and provided the right moment was chosen when building operations were in progress, there was little difficulty in finding the nests. They were very regular in their date of arrival, the cocks being about a week ahead of the hens, and singing almost continuously till their wives arrived. Several cock wood-wrens known to me would, during this waiting period, escort me about their property, fluttering and singing just in front of my face till I left their ground, but this aggressiveness always diminished after the hen's arrival.

Such an arrival was once actually seen by Mr. Medlicott in a small wood where there was only one cock wood-wren. He was sitting by the cock bird which had been there some days, and listening to its loud and continuous singing. Suddenly it stopped and appeared to listen, and then flew off quickly in a straight line, followed by Mr. Medlicott, who, guided by the squealing, found cock and hen together in a great state of excitement over their meeting. The weather was bad at the time and nesting did not start for over a week, but at Geneva, where bad weather seldom lasts for long, building nearly always started within a

## *Geneva's Birds*

day or two of the arrival of the hen. For the first day she would generally go poking about all over her property, escorted by the cock, perpetually descending to the ground and trying to make up her mind exactly where the nest should be. The choice seems left to her, but the cock may have to give his approval ; at any rate she leads him by the nose and, so far as I can see, makes all the plans and does nearly all the work. Once her mind is made up, which often takes a whole day, the nest is very rapidly constructed provided the weather is dry. If hen wood-wrens and their cousins the chiffchaffs and willow-wrens could forbear to squeal when building, their nests would be much more difficult to find, but luckily they cannot hold their tongues. It is always a delight to me to see a wood-wren disappear into a bank practically bare of covert, and walk up to find that inconspicuous little oblong slit which forms the entrance to the comfortable nest.

Wrynecks are common enough in the district—much too common in the opinion of the tits, whose nests they rob. This predatory habit of the wryneck does not seem to be known to most people, and the bird looks so innocent, stupid and unassuming that no one would suspect it of murder. As a matter of fact all the wrynecks with which I have become intimate have been guilty of murder, and I believe it to be their invariable custom to occupy a tit's nest and destroy its contents whatever they may be. To avoid monotony the crimes of only one particular pair in one particular year shall be related. A pair of bluetits had as usual reared eleven babies in a box just outside the front door and the young were half-fledged when a pair of wrynecks showed an interest in the box. For some days they worked at the entrance, driven away at intervals by the rightful owners only a quarter their size, but always returning and keeping up that appalling monotony of hideous sound for which they are rightly famous. After some days one of the wrynecks got inside and hauled out a baby bluetit by the back of its skull, which it cracked. The



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process continued and the bluetits were extracted one by one. Perhaps I ought to have shot the brutes instead of throwing stones at them, which had no effect, but I was interested and dislike interfering in the spring even with crime. After the last murder had been done and all the contents of the box had been thrown out by the wrynecks, they decided that the entrance was too small or that something else was wrong, and transferred their attention to the next box, in which a great tit had laid a second clutch. The eggs and all the nesting material were heaved out, but again the wrynecks were not quite satisfied and moved round the house to a third box, whence a family of marsh tits, fortunately for themselves, had just flown. Again all the nest was ejected through the opening, and at last the criminals settled down and reared their hideous brood on the bare boards. I inspected the nest on the day when the first young wryneck was hatched and can testify to the fact that it hissed a few hours after leaving the egg ; its mother hissed even more alarmingly and raised all the feathers on her head and neck when the box was opened. Wrynecks may of course have some good points, but they have never displayed them to me, and I agree with the British titmice that it is a good thing for England that we do not rear so large a stock of them as Switzerland. I once saw fifteen on one tree all talking together and the noise was dreadful.

It seems a natural though rather a brutal step to pass from wrynecks to tits, of which Geneva boasts a large and varied supply. I am not a believer in the willow tit, for all marsh tits have to me exactly the same accent, the same habits and the same appearance, but in any case all our tits—including our Scottish tit, the crested—are there. The Jura and the Alps are the main home of cole and crested, but a few pairs of both are sprinkled about wherever there are Scotch firs on the plain. We nearly always had one pair of crested that fed at the bird table and bred in the wood, but they never seemed to bring their babies to eat with us.

## *Geneva's Birds*

They and the marsh tits were very well behaved and never interfered with or swore like the great tits and bluetits at other birds ; the marsh tits had particularly pretty manners in the spring, when the cock would flutter outside the box, call off the sitting hen, conduct her to the table and himself place little titbits in her mouth. For those who desire marsh tits to feed outside their windows, I can recommend sunflower seeds rather than fat or cocoanut.

Partly because they remind me of pleasant places in Scotland and elsewhere, partly because they are the only tits with any pretence of musical genius, and partly because of the top-knot from which they get their name, crested tits are my favourites in the family, and a very nice family too. Mr. Medlicott and I had a lot of fun with our first nest of crested tits in Rothiemurchus Forest many years ago. The hen was seen carrying food to a rotten silver birch and on examining the hole in the tree it seemed possible to remove a wedge of bark, peep in at the family, and replace the bark without doing any harm. We did so rather hurriedly in the parents' absence and retired to watch ; the hen arrived with a mouthful of caterpillars, lit at the entrance and dropped in, but in doing so kicked loose the bit of bark. Out she came spitting forth caterpillars and swear words simultaneously, crest erect and little black eye flashing. She perched on a bough and sat there swearing for some moments, then betook herself to the wood to inform her husband of the disaster. A great deal of conversation came from the wood, and we gathered that the cock was either incredulous of the story or loath to leave his meal and trouble about the matter ; in any case we had time to replace the bark securely before the two birds arrived together at the birch tree. The cock gave one look at the nesting hole repaired to its normal state, turned a contemptuous eye on his wife and left her with a ' what did I tell you ? ' She remained staring at the bit of bark for a good five minutes before she entered the nest.

## *Geneva's Birds*

I do not know the range of crested tits, but in every part of Europe where I have seen Scotch fir, Sweden, Norway, Switzerland and the Pyrenees, these birds have been plentiful. It used to be said that they were confined in Scotland to the Spey valley, but that is not now the case, for they are to be found north of Inverness, and there seems no reason why they should not spread or be introduced into those parts of England where Scotch firs grow. The crested is the commonest tit in the fir forests of the Alps and Jura, but its numbers were greatly reduced in the hard winter of 1930-31.

The long-tailed tits, though to my eyes and ears exactly the same birds as those in England, place their nests in trees rather than in bushes. Like the firecrest they seem to prefer the under side of a bough on a spruce, but another common site is a fork high up in an oak or poplar. The colour of the lichen on the nest then blends perfectly with the bark and unless the birds are seen at work their homes are extremely hard to detect.

Having been born and bred in a great hawfinch country near Epping Forest, it was pleasant to find such old friends fairly common at Geneva. Hawfinches are a regular parasite of the horn-beam and though that tree is not nearly so common at Geneva as in Essex, there are enough to draw a good company of hawfinches, particularly from February to April. In some winters I found them eating mistletoe berries as well as horn-beam seeds, and during the last two years we succeeded in getting a little flock to come and eat sunflower seeds every day at a bird table. They were very deliberate in their habits, and though not quarrelsome with other birds, they never allowed themselves to be jostled or disturbed at their meals by sparrows, tits or nuthatches. One old hen in particular would seize and hold the best place while she deliberately munched her seeds, and not relinquish her position till she felt she could eat no more. A hawfinch is a good example of a bird which is perfectly easy

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to discover if its note is known, but which without that knowledge may easily pass unnoticed in the tops of the trees, for it is much shyer than most finches and makes itself scarce on the first approach of a stranger. To my ear the note, a sort of tzit-zit, resembles the common call note of a robin, but is much more penetrating. There is not much beauty of form in a hawfinch ; indeed he has a futurist look about him, being top-heavy, grotesquely large in the head and beak, and short in the tail—but the cocks have very fine and uncommon colouring, if only they will allow approach close enough for its examination.

Every February great numbers of skylarks and woodlarks migrate north over the plain of Geneva, the former leaving a fair number of pairs to breed, usually on dry marshes and not on the cultivated land, while some of the latter nest at the foot of the Jura and in a few isolated places on the plain. A great deal of poetry has been written on the skylark, but to me he is a most inferior bird to a woodlark, both in appearance and song. Instead of mounting to an absurd height like a skylark the smaller bird goes up to a reasonable altitude, from which he can be comfortably heard, and then maintains his elevation flying round and round and varying his song to a much greater extent than a skylark ; moreover, whatever the poets may say, it is a much better song. In addition to the regular official song, the little trilling note with which woodlarks address each other both on the ground and in the air has far more music in it than anything a skylark can produce, and a woodlark's neat little cup nest, especially with its owner tucked up in it, is a delightful thing to see and extremely difficult to find. As a test for patience and scientific work the finding of a woodlark's nest ranks very high, and I am grateful to the little creatures for the amount of sport and satisfaction they have given me.

I have had associations with starlings in a good many parts of the world, but the ones which arrive in Geneva in February and stay to

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breed seem to have greater powers of mimicry than other starlings. The moment a cock starling took up his position at his nesting site he would start imitating something, most commonly the whistle of an oriole, varied by the catcall of that bird. Every year there would be one or two real experts among the cock starlings, while the talent of other performers was less developed, but strangely enough this mimicry was commonest in March, that is two months before they had the faintest hope of meeting an oriole. Did their arrival in their breeding haunts recall to their minds the pleasant music that they had heard during the previous summer or was the memory more recent and had they spent the winter with the orioles in Africa? I believe the former theory is correct, and the following evidence seems to corroborate it. A certain starling at Geneva could take off a common partridge with startling accuracy, and he could do an oriole as well. There can hardly be any spot on the globe where common partridges and golden orioles winter together, and there are practically no partridges at Geneva. My conclusion is that this particular starling had wintered in Western Europe—very likely in England—whence his association with a partridge, and that he had learnt his oriole notes in the previous summer at Geneva. This theory is further borne out by the fact that in January 1932 a starling at Horsey in Norfolk imitated a golden oriole. Other Geneva starlings imitated quails, blackbirds, thrushes, jays, curlews and other creatures, including some birds quite unknown to me, and one of them last year used to reel off without any pause imitations of five or six different birds and the croak of a frog, which gave a most ridiculous effect. Whatever the cause, their mimicry was always most intense just after they arrived and consisted more often than not of imitations of birds not present in the district at the moment.

The most domestic bird at Geneva is the black redstart. He takes the place of our English robin in this respect, for the Geneva robin is by no means domestic and not even tame. Black redstarts prefer mountain

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villages but there are certain farms, villages, and even streets on the plain which for some reason attract them, and when a pair takes to a particular house, they seem to consider their title to possession at least equal to that of the human inhabitants. There are few uglier songs than a black redstart's, but his complete fearlessness or rather friendliness, his air of having bought the place, and his smart appearance make him a welcome feature of the home. I should personally never take a farm in the Canton of Geneva unless it was passed as good enough by a pair of these birds.

The harbour of Geneva deserves special mention, for though surrounded by the town it is looked upon by the officials and by blackheaded gulls, coots, pochard, tufted duck and dabchicks as a sanctuary from the shooting on the lake itself. At the sound of a shot outside, pochard, tufted and coots head straight for the town and pour into the harbour to join the crowd already there. Motor boats and other craft are constantly plying across, but inside the sanctuary these wild creatures only paddle a yard or two to get out of their way, and there is sufficient weed on the bottom to feed all the company throughout the winter. The other harbours up the lake are also used as sanctuaries, and diving duck can generally be seen close in all along the shore, for shooting is forbidden on water within two hundred yards of the bank. All the duck, coots and gulls leave by about the beginning of April, when the black kites arrive to do their fishing on the lake. They seem to be strictly carrion feeders and pick up only dead fish, particularly after a storm, and refuse floating either on the lake or down the Rhone. I never could feel much enthusiasm for a black kite ; it gives an impression of laziness and clumsiness—moreover it looks dingy in colour and keeps a very untidy nest, which is often decorated with dirty scraps of paper. A pair or two nested in a wood on my property, and many more on the cliffs of the Salève and in other woods about the plain. For some cause the birds

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often collect in large flocks up to fifty and more, and go slowly through aerial evolutions. To me their one redeeming feature is the trick of slowly passing food from claw to bill and back again while in the air.

A mile or two from Geneva is a large reed-bed on the Rhone, which is being gradually invaded by the main rubbish dump of the town. This place, with its ponds, is the breeding haunt of a colony of little bitterns. The local anglers and the bitterns are both attracted by tench which inhabit the ponds, and the rival fishermen sit for hours close together, both intent on their sport and paying no attention to each other. The bittern's method of fishing, which seems much more successful than that of his human rivals, is to perch on a stake or bunch of reeds on the water's edge with his neck so elongated that he looks like a reed, and thence watch for a passing tench. On seeing his prey the bird's neck is curved into a half-cock position ready for the lightning thrust of his bill into the water ; if successful there is a pause while he balances himself preparatory to throwing up the fish, catching it and swallowing it end on. I once saw a night heron at this pool in difficulties with a large tench. He kept hitting it against a bough to end its struggles, but while I was there he never could quite make up his mind to risk all, throw it into the air and swallow his prize. There are always night herons to be seen on the streams on their way north in April, but they do not apparently remain to breed in the district, like the little bitterns. The rubbish-dump marsh, despite its unsavoury smells, mass of paper and other rubbish, is the haunt of many birds. Kingfishers catch their prey on the ponds and nest in the Rhone banks close by ; great and little reed-warblers build in the reeds—and rear innumerable young cuckoos ; black-headed buntings, grasshopper warblers, water rails, and water hens all nest there, and every starling in the canton seems to roost in the reed-beds. Fortunately for one's nose it was possible to survey the place from high ground at a safe distance, and from this point I once

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made fairly certain of the position of a bittern's nest, but the bottom was so boggy, and the smell and appearance of the water so unpleasant, that after half an hour's plunging and fighting with the mosquitos I left the swamp in disgust.

Curlews have always been favourites with me and it was pleasant to hear them passing at night in March and again in the summer and to find them nesting within reach of Geneva. I had always associated the spring whistle of a curlew with a moor, but both at the eastern end of the Lake of Geneva and on the marshes of the Versoix, some twelve miles from the town, a number of pairs always breed. One particular pair used to engage the attention of my wife and myself every year, and the finding of their nest became an annual ceremony on the second or third Sunday in April. The ground was so flat that no vantage point for surveying the marsh was available, which made the discovery of the nest a matter of some difficulty ; nevertheless, with the exception of one spring when the birds apparently suffered a tragedy, we found it every year. If you regard, as I do, the finding of a bird's nest as a form of sport, curlews provide as much fun as any bird that flies, for they are highly intelligent, suspicious and up to all the tricks of the trade. The best procedure seems to be first to walk your ground and note any curlew that goes off low and silently, then select the best vantage point at a considerable distance, not less than three hundred yards from the place, hide up and watch for her to come back. She will not go straight to the nest, but will probably fly quietly in to a point at least a hundred yards from it and after standing on some small eminence and preening herself, as though eggs were the last thing in her mind, she will usually start running with her head held high in the *wrong* direction and on the higher ground ; then if you have patience and can remain unseen she will pause and, taking to the lower ground, she will turn for her real destination and with shoulders hunched and, in an attitude that suggests a guilty



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conscience, slink on to her eggs. Your eyes will be tired from looking through the glass before she gets there, and it helps much to have a companion who can take turns at watching her. It is an easy matter to miss the spot where she finally settles down unless, before putting down your glass, you immediately take a mark such as a bush, reed, flower or other object directly in line with the nest. If there are two of you it pays for one to crawl some distance to one side before any attempt is made to move up closer, for by this means two converging lines may be obtained on the bird as it rises from the nest. Considering the great size of the eggs and the open nature of the ground the nest, though never hidden, is in most cases extremely hard to see. When first you see it, the great eggs look obvious enough, but turn away a moment and look again ; you will find that you can stare straight at them and notice nothing. Of all birds' notes the curlew's spring whistle is to me the most soothing and satisfying. It seems so exactly appropriate to those wide open spaces where it is heard. I have often tried to imitate it, and though I can get somewhere near the solemn low notes with which it starts I have to break off for want of breath when the soprano tremolo in the middle is reached, and while the curlew seems to retain all its wind to hold on to those long-drawn wailing pipes at the end, my wind has gone and I subside into a miserable hiss.

Both marsh and Montague harriers were generally seen in the spring, and at least one pair of the latter used to nest on a marsh within reach of Geneva. In 1930 the nest was discovered, but unluckily only a few days before my leave was due, so that our attempt at photography failed, for lack of time. The few days we had in the tent were, however, amusing, and my first sight of a Montague at five feet was most impressive for she was still suspicious of the tent and her look of fury as she clutched a dead lark and glared first at me and then at her fluffy infant made my hand tremble so much that the camera was apparently in motion when

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I took the photograph. Unluckily there was only one baby and a rotten egg, which the former had apparently received instructions to incubate. Now and then it would momentarily forget its duties and wander off to the edge of the nest, and then, remembering its instructions, waddle back and dump itself again on the top of its uncomfortable charge. The ground round the nest was so wet that we requisitioned a kitchen table and placed it in the tent to carry the photographer and his camera. The first day I occupied the table my legs dangled into the water and after sitting for some time a sharp pinch was felt where my stocking failed to meet my knickerbockers. I clutched the place and drew my hand back in horror, for something slimy was attached to my leg: there, firmly implanted, were two enormous leaches, the vanguard of a wriggling mob on my boots and in all the surrounding water. Being ignorant of the proper method of detaching a leach, I touched the string which acted as a telephone from photographer to watcher stationed in a bush a hundred yards in the rear. The watcher (Crees) knew no more about leaches than I did, but with the help of a match we scratched them painfully off. For the rest of the time I took good care to wear gum-boots, but even then these unpleasant creatures were always crawling up the rubber or the legs of the table and had to be flicked back into their proper element. What they lived on in our absence I cannot imagine, for the place was entirely unfrequented by cattle and the occasional frontier guard was very careful not to get his feet wet. On our first morning's photography we noticed a man in the distance using a glass on us and on returning to the car to pack up, two Customs officials appeared from a neighbouring wood, confident of catching real smugglers at last, as they carried their mysterious cases to the waiting car. It was amusing to watch their disappointment when they recognized me as a well-known harmless lunatic.

Montague's harriers have received much attention in recent years from writers and photographers, but I cannot refrain from attempting a

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description of the method a cock Montague employs to feed his hen. Montagues consider themselves, and with every justification, the flying aces among birds, and it is apparently *infra dig.* to hand their captures to their wives on firm ground ; they employ instead the following complicated method. The cock, who does all the hunting during the breeding season, returns with his prey and when over the nest thrusts out a foot to show that he carries food. The hen at once mounts from the nest to meet him, and the two plane away till he is from six to ten feet above, and up-wind of her ; this position attained, she turns over on her back in the air and he drops (not throws) his food straight into her claws, which are simply held to receive it across her chest. There is no haste, no clutching, and the impression given is that of a good fieldsman judging correctly and making a perfect catch in the country. With the prey in her claws she drops back to earth to complete the plucking, and if she is still brooding to eat it herself, if hatched to carry it to the young in the nest. In any event plucking is not performed at the nest and the end of the second, not the first, flight indicates the position of the latter. The whole performance, if it can be watched through the glass, is one of easy elegance, perfect judgment, and unerring accuracy. Sometimes the ' pass,' as it is called, is made from hand to hand as in the case of the marsh harrier, and occasionally I have seen it performed on the ground, but no self-respecting Montague has any business to engage in such low practices.

A considerable migration of quails comes through Geneva every year, and a few stay to breed, nearly always in the marshes—I imagine because nests made in the crops would be destroyed by the harvest. A quail could sometimes be heard at night slowly approaching the house on foot, calling as it came, and then passing away to the north, and on several occasions the birds were picked up walking down the streets of the town. I have been told that they walk across Africa right down to

the beach of the Mediterranean, and take off for the long sea flight only when the first wave practically hits them—to land exhausted on the shores of Europe ready for their second long march to the north. The migration of such weak flyers as quail and landrail is one of the many mysteries of migration, and I have often wondered whether there is any special preparation for the two great overseas flights of the year. Do they all engage in wing exercises for so many hours per day, like a young bird before it leaves the nest on its first flight, or do they at dawn and dusk take longer and longer practice flights until they reach the coast? If so, I have never seen any evidence of such flights in the autumn on the return journey, and it seems to me more probable that the wing muscles are strengthened for the flight mainly, at least, by gymnastic exercises.

Out of all the host of birds that spend their summer at Geneva my selection in the next five chapters may seem very small. I claim it is select, for the creatures it includes possess a character; none of them are dull or stupid, all of them are good-looking, and the habits of some of them are little known. The selection is small because I am a beginner with the camera, and only started some three years ago; it is small also because time does not lie heavy on the hands of a member of the League secretariat, and time is essential for success in bird photography.

## THE GOLDEN ORIOLE

IT WOULD be impossible to paint too bright the colours of a cock oriole—buttercup yellow and glossy black—and those occasions, which are not too easy to come by, when he shows himself at close range and in bright sunlight, produce a sensation of amazement that anything in a temperate climate can be quite so tropically brilliant. I know no European bird—except, perhaps, a kingfisher—which gives quite the flash in the sun that is given by a cock oriole.

In most years in March, letters appear in the English papers about the arrival of orioles, which are, I think, generally caused by green woodpeckers, and there is the excuse that the rump of a green woodpecker in certain lights has a very yellow appearance, though in fact the oriole is a much smaller bird and not such a fool as to arrive in March. The reason why orioles come so seldom to England, whereas they are quite common around Boulogne, has always been a puzzle to me. A bird with particularly strong flight, that travels from central Africa to Holland, can have no fears of the Channel, and the slaughter of a certain number of individual birds by keepers and collectors is hardly sufficient reason for their absence from the oak woods in the south of England that seem to the uninitiated such perfect breeding places for the birds. The only possible explanation for their absence that I can suggest is want of proper nesting material or a lack of cockchafer and grasshoppers, which seem to be their principal food in May and June. However that may be, it is a sad loss for England, and I can never feel that an oak wood is quite complete in the summer without its pair of orioles.

The cocks arrive in Geneva in the last days of April or the first days of May (the commonest date for the first cock is April 28), and

## *The Golden Oriole*

they generally have to wait ten days or a fortnight before their wives join them ; the dates of arrival of both in the Pas de Calais are a week or ten days later. The cocks whistle their way cheerily across Europe, taking short flights along regularly established lines from one group of trees to another ; I have, for instance, seen three single cocks at intervals of five minutes taking identically the same line and stopping at identically the same trees. At the moment of arrival, when the foliage is not fully out on the oaks and the whistling is almost continuous in the morning and again from about five-thirty to seven in the evening, they are much easier to see than later in the season ; all the more so because during the period of waiting for the hens, during the building of the nest, which is usually started the moment the hens arrive, and also just after an egg is laid, orioles are very noisy birds. When, however, they are sitting, an occupation which is shared by the cock and hen, and even when the young are hatched, they generally become, like jays, extremely silent and secretive.

The whistle of a cock oriole is the most human of all bird whistles known to me, so much so that the first time I heard it I wondered whether it was made by a boy or a bird. I used to think that I could make a very fair imitation of it, but as no oriole has ever shown the smallest indication of paying any attention whatever to the noises I produced, complete disillusionment on that point has now been reached. It is a strange fact that every year at Geneva many cock starlings imitate, over a month before there is any chance of their seeing an oriole, the notes of both cock and hen. The French word *loriot*, pronounced in the French way, is a very happy name for the bird, for if it be possible to convey anything by writing down a whistle in letters of the alphabet, *lo-lo, loriot* is, I think, the nearest approach to one of the whistling calls. Another, a particularly cheery sound, reminds me of the phrase ' r-r-right you are.' A cock oriole's whistles are so good in tone, so cheery, and so generally

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pleasant that it is a thousand pities that no one has taught him a better *repertoire*. The quality is first-rate, but just as you are settling down in expectation of a really remarkable performance the bird forgets all but the first line of two or three different songs. In complete contrast to the whistle, the call note of both cock and hen has been described, with more truth than politeness, as a cross between a petulant baby and a wheezy cat. Orioles, when excited—for instance during fighting, courting, or in times of great anxiety—make a noise very like the call of a greenwood-pecker under similar circumstances, and between their whistles the cocks, particularly when they first arrive, often warble continuously, not unlike a sedge warbler. Though the whistle can be heard at a great, and the call note at a considerable, distance, the warble is only audible up to about a hundred yards. Another very peculiar sound, reserved for special occasions, like pulling a champagne cork, is, I think, intended for a perfectly definite purpose—to make the intruder jump and so give his presence away ; in my own case it has been extremely successful. Under great provocation, such as the presence of a rival cock or a magpie near the nest, they will sometimes make a noise half-way between a sneeze and a snore.

On two or three occasions I have been present when the hen has arrived and joined the cock. A year or two ago, for instance, early in the morning led by the sound of his whistling, I got my glass on to a cock oriole, which had taken up his station on a particular piece of ground near my house. He was whistling continuously in a single tree in a park when suddenly two hens issued from a group of bushes and dashed at him screaming ; the rest of the movements were almost too rapid to follow but it was clear that he received simultaneous proposals from the two ladies—it appears to be the universal oriole fashion for ladies to make proposals. All three dashed off in their beautiful courting flight, which consists of a series of flashing turns in the air executed at a great pace,

## *The Golden Oriole*

the cock's bill practically touching the hen's tail, and his every movement conforming exactly to the hen's, so that the impression is that of one bird with four wings.

The nest, which is almost as beautiful as the eggs with their thin white shells, through which the yolk shows faintly pink, artistically spotted with black and yellow, is securely hung to two horizontal forks of a bough, generally fairly near the top of the tree, where in a wind it blows about in a most alarming manner. It is made on the principle of a circular landing net, and in order to provide itself with an almost complete hoop on which to string the mesh of the net, the bird selects a forked branch from which spring on the inner sides of each fork two smaller branches that nearly meet at their tips. To either side of this hoop, complete except for the narrow space between the tips of the smaller branches, are attached the flat cords of bark and other strong material which loop right round the nest to form the hanging mesh of the net, and in order I suppose to prevent fraying, woolly material is first wound round the hoop of branches to act as a bed for the cord attachments. At the building the cock accompanies (in both senses of the word) the hen, but does, so far as I can make out, not a single stroke of work. She binds on the woolly material, sitting on the base of the fork and standing back from her task like an artist to remove material from one side and place it on the other, till the two sides are exactly even. It is she who knots the cords to the branch with her bill, her neck being used as a sort of handle and contorted to the shape desired, like some mechanic's patent tool. That these attachments are securely made is proved by the fact that a nest built in June 1926, fully exposed to all the winds of heaven, remained intact until the end of June 1927. In the early stages, when only the framework has been built, the nest has a loose appearance like an empty net ; but as the work progresses the mesh is made to assume the form of a bowl, probably by the action of the



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bird turning round inside the nest. It is sometimes built in a large tree, but much more often, in my experience, in a spindly young oak or wild cherry, twenty to thirty feet high. The nest looks like a little yellow football, and is, when once you have seen it, perfectly easy to see, provided there are no boughs in the way ; but I find that I can look again and again straight at it without noticing anything at all. The photographs make the nest look too small for the bird, and the photographs are right ; it is much too small, both for the old bird sitting on the eggs and for the growing family, which seem cramped and uncomfortable, and I can only suppose that, together with other intelligent inhabitants of the continent of Europe, they have never learnt the advantages of a real armchair. If it is in a small wood of comparatively low trees which can be watched from a distance and the coming and going of the birds observed, it is not a difficult nest to find, given the ability to sit quite still and the determination not to jump to conclusions until the exact locality of the nest is determined by the different flights of the birds converging on one spot. If, however, patience is exhausted, and you are discovered wandering aimlessly about on their premises, they become intensely suspicious, will refuse to give any further assistance, and, like servants of the law, escort the trespasser about in every direction. One pair which completely defeated me marched me home on several occasions right up to my door. If the nest is in a large thick wood that cannot be watched from a distance, its discovery is a very different matter, and ears are the only hope ; but I have generally found that the birds' ears are better than mine, and they learn more about me than I do about them.

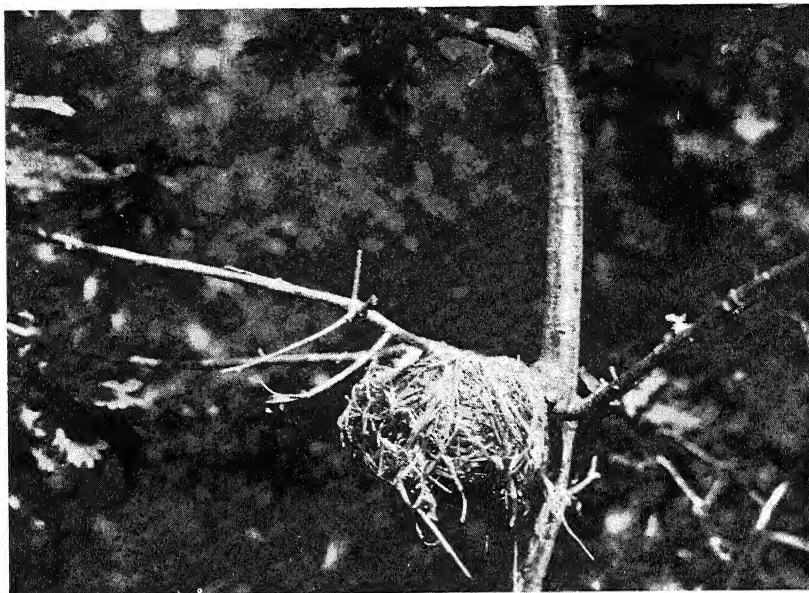
They have one foolish habit which, so far as I know, they only share with one other two-legged creature ; they pay calls—and the gentlemen go too. I have suffered on several occasions from these ceremonies, which interrupt the more useful occupation of nest building and last an



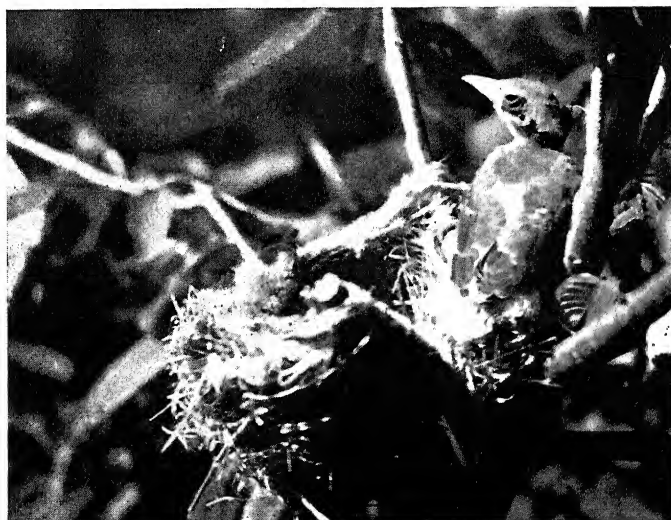
12. COCK GOLDEN ORIOLE



13. HEN GOLDEN ORIOLE



14. GOLDEN ORIOLE'S NEST



15. YOUNG ORIOLE LEAVING NEST

## *The Golden Oriole*

unconscionable time, and I once sat through the whole business with my glass on the callers at a range of about fifty yards. A pair which were afterwards discovered to have half finished their nest were visited by another pair ; all work ceased, the four of them sat in a little oak tree, hens on the top, cocks in the lower branches. The cocks were extremely voluble and at intervals quarrelsome, but the hens sat in dead silence with their bills tilted up, looking at the view—the view obstructed by each other's clothes. Altogether it was an absurdly human performance, at which all four birds seemed bored to death, and I was grateful when the visitors suddenly took themselves off ; and so, I think, were my particular pair, which at once resumed work and thereby showed me their nest.

Orioles are extremely bold and pugnacious birds, and will attack and drive from the neighbourhood of their nests crows, magpies, cuckoos, kestrels and even such harmless creatures as wood-pigeons and woodpeckers ; in fact, the appearance of anything larger than himself seems to excite the bird to a perfect frenzy. I once saw a cock oriole keep right on the tail of a terrified wood-pigeon for some half a mile across country, which gives an idea of the pace they can go when they like, and the groundlessness of some of their suspicions. On ordinary occasions the flight is, to me, rather like that of a starling, but more buoyant and cheerful, giving the impression that it is just the simplest thing in the world, requiring no effort and involving no fatigue.

Mr. Ralph Chislett, who came out to Geneva at my invitation to take some photographs of orioles, experienced great difficulty owing to the failure of the camera to register the contrast between black and yellow, *the* feature whereon a cock oriole prides himself. On the advice of a Geneva photographer we subsequently, to some extent, got over that difficulty by the use of a pale yellow glass screwed into the camera behind the lens. One of the nests here illustrated was thirty feet high in a

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whippy cherry tree, and a ladder, after being moved up from a distance at the pace of a slow snail, was erected on an adjoining tree sufficiently strong to hold it motionless. The nest was gently brought in to the distance required—about two feet —by a rope from the cherry tree to the ladder, and at the final stage the whole contraption looked like an imitation signal box in green cloth with a tall and flimsy staircase. We had to take the greatest trouble to trick the birds, one of which was invariably on guard, into thinking that the man who went up the ladder into the hide did in fact come down again and did not remain ; this was done by two always going up and one descending noisily when the man inside the hide had made the camera absolutely ready. When we had to change places, the man in the hide signalled by pulling a string, which acted as a fifty yard telephone, and the change over took place at the lower edge of the hide, where there was just room to pass on the ladder. Every morning a large flock of crows used to arrive in the neighbourhood of the nest to the great annoyance of the orioles, which invariably attacked them. The cock on one occasion with a furious charge struck one of his enemies amidships, and turned him clean over in the air.

The young left the nest before they could really fly on the morning on which the pictures were taken, the fourteenth day after hatching and the forty-sixth day after the nest was begun. At 8 a.m. one youngster, which looked more forward than the others and had spent all the morning on the top of the nest sunning himself and exercising his wings, looked upwards and began slowly to climb a perpendicular bough. When he had gone about three feet he paused, violently fluttered his wings, and gave out that peculiar laughing scream which his parents only make at moments of great emotion. It was, I think, a shout of triumph, and he continued on his way out into the sun at the very top of the cherry, from which point of vantage he again gave vent to his feelings and was promptly rewarded by the cock with a large green grasshopper, delivered

## *The Golden Oriole*

whole. I had always imagined that the young would be persuaded to leave the nest by their parents with the help of starvation or some other violent method. That was not so in his case ; he went on his own from the pure spirit of adventure, and neither of his parents either talked to him or bribed him until he got to the top of his tree ; in fact, during the climb they entirely ignored him and fed the other two in the nest. After he had gone one of the other two young birds opened its mouth and demanded food from its sister, which shortly afterwards returned the compliment.

Orioles are very fond of bathing. One hot day in August I was attracted by loud and continuous whistling in a pool below a bridge, where, perched on a tree above the river, was a cock oriole, which every few minutes hurled itself in a headlong dive into the stream, screaming with excitement as it fell and rose again from the water.

Whether it be the blaze of colour, the contrast between the musical whistle and the grotesquely ugly call note, the mixture of intelligent cunning and aggressive courage that make up the personality of an oriole, he is a bird that captivates his human acquaintances.

## Chapter IV

# THE HOOPOE

*Despite the cheap attraction of an ornamental crest,  
The back view of the Uupuu is in many ways the best*

THOSE WORDS of the poet are as true now as the day they were written—and not only of the hoopoe. For the amateur photographer a black and white pattern is a very pleasant help in time of trouble, and the zebra marking on the wings and tail of a hoopoe supplies it. I had always seen hoopoes passing through Geneva in April, but none had ever stopped to breed on the property. In 1930, however, a cock hoopoe was seen in April examining a hole in a tree, and all would have been very simple had not his wife, who arrived shortly afterwards, discovered 'a better 'ole' in another place that it took me three solid weeks to discover. The trouble about a hoopoe is twofold. Until the eggs are laid he is constantly making his 'hoo-hoo-hoo' note (delivered without any accent or expression, as though the bird were utterly bored), but after that event he reverts to complete silence. Secondly, that period so fatal to the secrecy of a bird's home, when materials are collected and carried for the building of the nest, is missed clean out, for the hoopoe does no nest building at all; he simply takes a hole, so that practically your only clue to the site is the cock feeding the hen when she is sitting. During that period she hardly ever leaves the nest, and the cock feeds her at regular hours, particularly between seven and eight in the morning and between six-thirty and seven-thirty in the evening. I pity the hen hoopoe sitting day and night cramped up in a dark and stuffy hole, with nothing to look forward to but an oblong black grub that looks like a miniature German sausage and is probably full of garlic, stuffed down her throat by her husband about ten





16. THE HOOPOE'S ORNAMENTAL CREST





17. HEN WITH A MOLE-CRICKET

## *The Hoopoe*

times a day. The treatment does not improve her looks, for she loses a lot of feathers, and when the young are hatched she emerges a bleached and mangy phantom of her former self. She does, however, to a considerable extent recover her beauty after the first few days of freedom.

This particular nest, in the middle of a shady wood, was eventually found by seeing the cock on two occasions enter the wood from two different directions, with one of these sausage grubs in his bill. By sitting at the point where the two lines of flight appeared to meet, I caught him spluttering and croaking against a hole in a tree, and that was the end of the mystery and the beginning of the slow approach from fifty yards up to three feet of a ladder, hide, platform and all the rest of the photographer's hideous paraphernalia. By the time the young were hatched we had got their parents used to almost anything.

There is something about the head of a hoopoe—the flatness of the cheeks, the crest, and the little eye—which makes him look a bit of a fool. He is no such thing. I have never met a bird that is more efficient in concealing the whereabouts of his home. His flight is a flip, flip, flippety affair, more like a jay's than any other bird's, but lighter and merrier. Whereas the jay looks as if he were saying, 'It's a long, long way to the next tree,' a hoopoe looks as if he would get there easily and on time. The golden rule of the hoopoe is 'Keep off the grass and don't get your feet wet,' and his idea of bliss is a lawn, a golf green, a path and a kitchen garden with plenty of bare ground in it. Armed with a pick, of which the thick end is for ornament and the thin end is for use, a pick strong enough to break up the crust of a gravel path, his practice is to march quickly and importantly round and round a garden or up and down a path, catching small insects as he walks, and stopping at intervals to probe and hack into the ground for all sorts of enemies of the kitchen garden. If I were a

## *The Hoopoe*

market gardener, I should certainly engage a pair of these birds, for they are industrious hunters with abnormal appetites, only equalled by those of their children. The amount of nasty insects that were rammed down the throats of the young in the course of an afternoon was a marvel, and they never ceased to scream for more. I am not, unfortunately, sufficiently knowledgeable about bugs to tell you what they all were or even to give their Latin names.

All this is more or less to the credit of the hoopoe, but here is the other side of the picture. For complete lack of sanitary arrangement a hoopoe's home beats anything I have ever seen ; the doorway, which is at the top of the house, is the only drain, and ten days after hatching the overflow begins. The parents have the sense after the first few days to keep their heads clear of the hole and to feed the young, whose beaks stretch beyond the entrance, from well outside. I believe it would be possible to find the exact whereabouts of a hatched nest of hoopoes by loosing a bagful of bluebottles in the neighbourhood and watching the way they go ; any fly with half a nose would soon be baying at the right hole. Whatever the truth of this theory, there is a constant stream of flies entering and leaving the nest.

The language used by both the parents under the camera was very bad. Not only did they give out their wheezy swear at the click, but they swore in anticipation as they lit, and they swore when no click followed or when, for some reason, the camera was not poking through the slit in the hide. While still suspicious of the strange sounds that greeted their approach to the nest, they would advance cautiously along the perch towards the open beaks of their young, like a child about to pick a hot sixpence out of a Christmas pudding. There is no objection, from the portrait taker's point of view, that his subject should be decorated with a crest, but there is every objection to that crest being perpetually in motion, as was the case with the hoopoe. This disadvantage

## *The Hoopoe*

to the ordinary camera is an advantage to the film, for perpetual motion is just what the film expert requires. The roll of an eye, the tilt of a sharp nose, best of all hair suddenly standing on end and again subsiding, are his only means of portraying character. The crest of the hoopoe acts, purposely or otherwise, exactly like the hackles on the back of a dog, but any change in feeling is, I think, more quickly registered. I have included in these illustrations a photographic caricature which may well represent a hoopoe's idea of his political opponent's appearance.

Those who look carefully at the details of the photographs may compliment the birds on their cleverness in selecting a hole with so convenient a perch below it ; the cleverness was ours, not the hoopoes, and if they look more closely still, they will see the nail by which it was attached to the tree. We got so sick of seeing the birds scrabbling about in ridiculous positions and wearing out their toenails on the bark that we supplied for their benefit and ours a reasonable twig in perfect focus and conveniently situated for the entrance to the nest—a gift which they accepted at once. May I respectfully suggest to other bird photographers, as Mr. Ralph Chislett suggested to me, that the artificial perch is a cheap, simple and effective means of making their subjects more comfortable and pinning them to the correct position for focus and background.

We noticed a number of facts about the conduct of the young and their diet, some of which are difficult to explain. During the first week after hatching the food consisted of a greyish yellow grub over an inch long. We first saw the heads of the young appear at the entrance on the eighth day after hatching, and by then the diet had changed to a varied assortment of mole crickets, cockchafers, the sausage grubs already referred to, and other beetles. So far as I could see, these creatures all arrived ready beheaded, possibly to make transport easier, or possibly to

## *The Hoopoe*

prevent their mandibles biting the dark red throats of the young in their last descent ; and if it is beheading is required, there is no more suitable subject than a beetle. At this period the feathers of the young were dark speckly brown, their bills quite short and almost black, not unlike the bill of a young starling, and there was still room for all heads to appear at the entrance to take the food from the parents as the latter stood on the perch. Four days later only one young bird was visible, and we believed that the others had flown or were dead ; the family likeness was now almost complete, there were even signs of a crest, and the bill had elongated and begun to assume the shape of a pick. Only after four more days did we discover that all three young were still in the nest, and that, owing to their growth, they were forced to take turns in occupying the best seat. They were now just like their parents, except that the bills were still rather shorter and darker ; their note as they impatiently awaited their food was like the sad little cough of a sick puppy, getting wheezier and wheezier as hunger increased or as they caught a sight of their parents.

After the occupant of the one ' stall ' had been fed, it was amusing to see and hear the scuffling that went on between the other two to seize his privileged place while he was engaged in swallowing. For some reason which I cannot explain, the food that I saw brought during about ten separate visits at this stage was once more the yellow-grey grubs given in early infancy—possibly owing to a bilious attack they were off lobsters and back on to buttered eggs. In the intervals between the visits of their parents, which were fairly frequent and regular except during the siesta hour of 2 to 3 p.m., the young amused themselves by attempts, which seemed always ineffective, to stab the flies which kept alighting and crawling about on the bark at the entrance to the hole. The holder of the ' stall ' would elongate his neck, peer round the corner and jab at a fly, then withdraw again, usually catching his crest against the roof and

## *The Hoopoe*

scraping its feathers forward at a most unbecoming angle over his nose. Whether they ever succeeded in catching a fly, and, if so, whether flies form an essential part of their diet, I cannot say, but in any event there was never a lack of these unpleasant little visitors. I was once or twice very conscious of the smell of a hoopoe, which closely resembles the inside of a birdseller's shop in the East End of London, and my terrier, which is not over-particular, curled up her lips in disgust when winding a patch of ground that one of the birds had just left.

In 1931 there was again a pair of hoopoes nesting on the property, and a great deal of trouble was expended before their home was discovered. Mr. Burdet, who had never had an opportunity of photographing these birds, came down from Holland and filmed them. They were so tractable that they may well have been the pair which had experienced the harmlessness of filming the previous year, but they were on this occasion rather more cleanly in their habits. The nest was in a small tree, and in a shallow hole that had been occupied by starlings the previous year. It contained some untidy nesting material and was about as dirty as a starlings' nest, but on at least one occasion the hen hoopoe made some attempt at cleaning it up.

As a golf green is as good as a lawn to a hoopoe, the installation of a course at Geneva has probably been an attraction to them, and their numbers seem on the increase. Several pairs used to use the golf course as a feeding ground and transport their babies thither, when they left the nest. With all our lawns and golf courses in England it is surprising that more hoopoes do not cross the Channel, but we are probably about at their northern limit, and it may be that the noxious bugs on which they thrive are not so plentiful as further south.

There is one trait of the hoopoe for which I forgive him much ; he always gives you warning of his arrival, so that it is possible to sleep in the hide between the visits of the birds, a great advantage when cooped up

## *The Hoopoe*

in a hot and stuffy tent for ages at a time. The warning is a low caa-caa-caa, only audible at a few yards, which he makes just before he actually comes to the nest. It is not a pretty noise in itself, but I shall always connect it with the pleasant anticipation of the soft flop of the bird on to the perch and the brilliant contrast of tawny yellow, black and white poised in the sun against the background of a mass of leaves in shade. And, after all, whatever the poet may say, I do rather like that crest.



18. 'OPEN YOUR MOUTH—



19. —FOR THE GRUB'



20. ARMED WITH A PICK



21. CARICATURE PROVIDED BY THE HOPOE



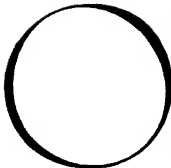


22. PORTRAIT OF HUBERT

*Adolphe Burdet*

# HONEY BUZZARDS

*Being the story of HUBERT and MARIA*

 ON MAY 23, 1929, I was sitting innocently engaged, as is my wont at that particular moment of the year, in watching icterine warblers in a wooded gulley that runs into the Rhone. The gulley has tall trees, mainly oak with a sprinkling of spruce, on the right bank, and the thickest jungle that ever drove thorns into a man's body on the left. The place fairly crawls with birds—magpies, jays, woodpeckers (green, great spotted, and middle spotted), wood-pigeons, stock doves, redstarts, flycatchers, wood-wrens, and firecrests on the tall timber side: nightingales, chiffchaffs, blackcaps, garden warblers, white-throats, icterines, red-backed shrikes, blackbirds, yellow-hammers on the left. Moreover, two pairs of orioles whose nests are at either end fight over the territorial rights of this delectable spot. If you want to see what is going on in the tall timber, you must sit on the top of the opposite bank of jungle; if you want to keep an eye on the jungle, you must sit in an opening in the tall timber; and there I sat, when—swish, flop! and a whacking great hawk landed in a spruce just over my head. Little birds are very pleasant, but once in a way I do like something big, and here it was—and not only big but unknown. I put my telescope on to him with that pleasant sensation which only a telescope gives, and gives to the full when the object is something really new. The bird was obliging enough to sit perfectly still for his examination, and I recognized him from his portrait in Dresser's *Birds of Europe* as a cock honey buzzard, lazily enjoying the morning sun and apparently in full possession of all he surveyed. If you think of an old gentleman with grey hair

## *Honey Buzzards*

(parrot grey) and a brilliant yellow eye, dressed in a white tie, white shirt, white waistcoat, short white trousers and a grey-brown tail coat with dark bars across the tails, you will gain a very fair idea of his general appearance. He regarded his creamy white front, unbroken except for two or three little flecks of brown at the root of the neck, with justifiable pride, and with extreme deliberation went over every feather, back and front. Was he expecting a lady, and, if so, what would she be like? Would she be good enough for him? Had they taken the property for the summer? At last he slipped from his perch and sailed lazily off, while I took up a position that gave me a view right down the gully, and sat tight to await events. There was no long delay; two great birds glided past me—my new acquaintance following a forbidding-looking female the colour of a chocolate éclair fading to coffee on parts of the tail. This is not, I understand from the books, the correct dress for a hen honey buzzard, but I cannot help that, and in any case it was the dress she wore. At this first impression I was a little disappointed with his choice—picked up, no doubt, in Africa, for, according to the farmer, they arrived together on May 19; but first impressions are not always correct, and I later became very much attached to the lady, and have some reason to believe that the feelings were reciprocated. They were, in appearance—only in appearance—an ill-assorted pair, and when seen together somehow made me think of Lord Lonsdale dressed for Ascot consulting a Gipsy fortune-teller. A few days later the cock was again stationed on his favourite spruce, engaged on his toilet, when a magpie perched jauntily on the bough below him; the buzzard did not even deign to look down until the magpie flirted its tail, when he leant over and very deliberately hissed at it, whereat the magpie lifted its head, looked distinctly shocked, and retired in silence. At last the buzzard raised itself and looked round, having evidently seen something behind it and invisible to me. The bird appeared so interested and pleased



23. LOOK AT THE BARS ON MY TAIL



24. MARIA WHISTLING TO ROBERT



25. MARIA BRINGS THE WASP NEST



26. MARIA FEEDING THE BABIES ON WASP GRUBS



## *Honey Buzzards*

that I felt it must have seen the hen, and presently, after a slow turn on his perch and a walk down the branch, he floated away into the oaks, to reappear for a second just opposite me, where he lit screened by the foliage. I slipped quietly across the gulley and stalked the place where he had lit, and he rose from a branch just over my head. There, in an ivy-covered oak, was a large, untidy nest, and from it with a splutter of wings came the hen, knocking off as she rose a sprig of fresh oak leaves.

The arrival of two large hawks among such a crowded population of other birds would, one would have thought, have caused considerable commotion, but as a matter of fact the smaller birds took practically no notice of them, and a pair of wood-wrens hunted constantly for insects on the oak and its attendant ivy, within a foot or two of the buzzard on the nest. If a buzzard flopped noisily about in the branches there would be a word or two of protest, but nothing approaching the commotion caused by a sparrow-hawk or a jay. During incubation the hen appeared to sit as a rule in the early hours and the cock in the middle of the day ; the bird off duty at the nest did not stand on guard near by, but took the morning or afternoon clean off looking for wasp grubs, as all good honey buzzards should.

Deliberate is the right adjective for them if you wish to be complimentary, lethargic if you do not, but you will take back the word lethargic if you catch that gleaming yellow eye, which follows everything—especially the flight of a queen wasp. Judging by the hawk standard, even on our first acquaintance they were not shy, and by the time I had finished with them their tameness, especially that of the hen, was quite absurd. When we reached that stage it was impossible to go on calling them ‘ the cock ’ and ‘ the hen ’ ; we had of necessity to get on to Christian names, and for the rest of this chapter they shall be given the names by which I shall always know them—‘ Hubert ’ and ‘ Maria.’

I believe that the first egg was laid on May 27 or 28, and the second

## *Honey Buzzards*

three or four days later, but I never dared to look, for fear of upsetting the birds ; I know by the general excitement about the nest that one baby was hatched on July 1, though cannot be sure if it was the first or the second ; when both babies were first seen together, one was considerably larger than the other. I must, therefore, apologize for my failure to settle definitely the scientific dispute which is I understand raging as to how long a honey buzzard takes to produce a baby.

The buzzards presented an obvious chance for photography, but the difficulty lay in the fact that the nest was placed in a bough overhanging the steep bank of the gully and running south from the stem, so that a hide in the tree itself would have been north of the nest and therefore in the worst possible position for light. No other tree was suitably placed, and the only hope of reaching the right position for a hide lay in resort to a fire-escape needing no support for its top. Demand was duly made from the Geneva Fire Brigade, which replied, perhaps with some justification, that their ladders were used for putting out fires and not for bird-nesting. The telephone service made a similar reply, but finally an arboreal gardener versed in the trimming of poplars produced the very thing, which looked, with our hide perched upon it, like a section of a scenic railway with a ticket office at the top. This absurd contraption, which could be raised, lowered and turned at any angle, was first dumped at about fifty yards from the nest and day by day moved slowly up till just after the hatching the ticket office was situated at eight feet south-east of the nest, by which time the birds took no notice whatever of it. A photograph of it is inserted at the beginning of Chapter I.

By the end of a week you could walk up and down the scenic railway, talk, smoke, come out on all fours backwards from the ticket office, shout for anything you wanted to those below without moving Maria from the nest and often without making her raise her head ; she did, however, once greatly resent the presence of a lady in the hide. Maria

## *Honey Buzzards*

was distinctly slow in the uptake, not to say dull, and in any event a very bad listener ; I often had to make the sounds emitted by professional photographers to make her raise her head and look pleasant, and it was a tiring and often an unproductive amusement. Maria on one occasion actually accepted a dead frog handed to her on a short stick by Crees standing on the ladder, while she sat on the nest. We never got quite so familiar with Hubert, partly, no doubt, because he was not so constantly on the nest. Some people that I could mention go purple at the back of the neck when their feelings get the better of them ; not so Hubert and Maria ; they went white, owing to the raising of the neck feathers and the consequent appearance of their white bases. My voice is not famed for its soothing qualities, but by saying the right thing at the right moment I generally succeeded in smoothing down the ruffled back of Maria's neck.

To go into details—and you can go into details when you watch from eight feet—the babies were for the first fortnight delightful little balls of creamy cotton-wool, with black noses, yellow iris and black (not yellow) eyes, which played very like puppies that are just beginning to walk. The play was rather rough sometimes, and there seemed a distinct danger that the bites of the larger of the two on the throat of the smaller might be serious. What did they eat ? Wasp grubs, of course, and wasp grubs galore. Hubert, as a rule, brought the wasp comb in bits about as big as a man's closed fist and gave it to Maria from hand to mouth (never from hand to hand, nor from mouth to hand), when she picked out the grubs very neatly and quickly with a bill shaped exactly for that purpose and popped them into the babies' mouths. On at least two occasions Maria returned with wasp comb after an absence of less than a quarter of an hour. I counted the number of cells in one of these bits of comb and there were over seventy, and as they used on an average four bits before lunch when the babies were about ten days old, the latter



## *Honey Buzzards*

alone must have eaten at least 250 wasp grubs by lunch or 500 in the day. Even supposing the parents only ate the same quantity, which is highly unlikely, that would account for 1000 presumptive wasps in a day. As the birds stayed three months in the district, I reckon that one pair of honey buzzards with twins accounts for 90,000 of these pests in the season. Once or twice when the babies had had enough the old bird would itself eat, say the last twenty, and certainly eat them as if it liked them. The only other food we saw at the nest were frogs—peeled at the nest and given very delicately in tiny morsels to the oldest baby only—and a dead tree pipit presented by me and laid on the nest. After very careful inspection, Hubert picked it up, swallowed some of the fluff and gave a mouthful to the baby, then plucked it, tasted the flesh himself and, being satisfied, doled out that also to the baby. Fluff first seemed rather bad luck, but I remembered the days when one got no jam till the end of the first bit of bread and butter. Anyhow, the young buzzard gobbled up both fluff and flesh with avidity. The frogs were peeled in the following manner: the head of the frog was grasped in the claw and the nape of its neck seized by the bill; the buzzard then raised its head and pulled backwards and upwards, the skin of the frog peeling off complete to the toes.

As the babies grew the food continued to be frogs and wasp grubs, but the frogs were eventually delivered whole. The wasp grubs were varied, I am glad to say, with hornets. On one occasion a precocious hornet, while in Maria's bill, opened its wings; she paused for some moments in thought, examined the business end of the hornet, and then did what I am sure you will agree was the right thing—she swallowed it herself instead of giving it to the babies. It may be suggested that, like the walrus and the carpenter with the oysters, she was merely 'selecting those of the larger size,' but that would, I think, be unfair to Maria. Most interesting of all, however, was the addition of a fruit diet. The

## Honey Buzzards

parents brought for the babies the ripe red berries of ' Lords and Ladies ' (*Arum maculatum*)—strange food for a hawk. According to the authorities that I have consulted, these berries are poisonous to human beings, and one old author even states that they are poisonous to birds ; he is wrong as regards honey buzzards. I do not know if there is any chemical connection between the poison in the sting of a wasp or hornet and the poison in *Arum maculatum*, but I am sure that honey buzzards must have some natural protection that renders them immune to the sting of a wasp, for the process of digging out a wasp's nest must take time and the feathers cannot prevent the birds being stung in the process. I have seen a number of places from which nests had been extracted, leaving hardly any of the comb, and these excavations looked as if a dog had dug out a rat from a small hole.

The young cock of 1929, when he left the nest, was a very handsome bird with chocolate and cream perpendicular stripes on his breast, and cream-coloured head with dark rings round his eyes like the heavy rimmed spectacles of a young Foreign Office official. He would fly after his parent when the latter brought the honeycomb ; while his sister, though several days older than he, still remained in the nest. She was a rather mangy edition of Maria.

Generally speaking, the buzzards were most silent birds, but we eventually discovered that they made at least four distinct notes. The call is a soft, long, low whistle which might be written ' Whee-eee-uh.' If either bird was on the nest the approach of the other was always heralded by this whistle from the sitting bird and answered by the other. If either became impatient a wheeze was introduced into the whistle, and as a signal to come right on to the nest the sitting bird added a sort of pleasing trill. Once, when I was in the hide, Hubert, high in the air, made a noise so like a curlew that I mistook it for that bird ; but the watcher below, who also described the call as that of a curlew, actually

## *Honey Buzzards*

saw the buzzard make it as he planed down to the nest with a bit of comb. The third sound may have been made by a chattering of the bill ; it was always emitted when Hubert and Maria were together and was obviously a term of endearment. It was only audible at a short distance, and sounded like the light ticking of some machine. The fourth sound was a screeching hiss and was only used when the birds were in a real temper. It went on for ten minutes on one occasion, and I tried (unsuccessfully at the moment) to find out the cause, but half an hour later Crees met a wet and dishevelled cat emerging from the gulley looking as if it had seen a ghost. I can prove nothing, but have no doubt in my own mind that the cat had both seen and felt the buzzard.

There are one or two details in which my observations do not quite agree with those of others. Lord Lilford and, I think, Dresser both say that honey buzzards are very partial to beeches and always choose fresh beech leaves to decorate the nest. Hubert and Maria, though I could have shown them plenty of beech trees within five hundred yards of the nest, used sprigs of oak or occasionally ash. We had to do a little bit of 'gardening' for purposes of light and focussing, but the buzzards were far worse offenders in the opposite sense. If we removed an obstructive leaf, the birds would plant a stalwart young oak in its place by the following morning. On one sunny occasion the parents covered their offspring with oak leaves at midday, so that they looked like the picture of the Babes in the Wood. Once, when Crees was in the hide, Maria, after some deliberation, planted an oak sprig between herself and the camera. This was more than he could stand, and he snapped out, 'Damn you, Maria, for a fool!'—whereupon the lady, perfectly unruffled, removed the offending decoration to the far side of the nest. This decoration habit is referred to again later in more detail.

On one never-to-be-forgotten morning Hubert arrived with a bit of comb, and feeling, I suppose, particularly gallant, handed it over to



27. MARIA AS THE FUSSY MOTHER



*Adolphe Burdet*

28. HUBERT PEELS A FROG

## *Honey Buzzards*

Maria, stretching both wings forward as though to embrace her. That was too much for me ; if my camera had been a car I should have double-declutched and gone backwards with the brake on all in one ; as it was, I did something which produced a blank smudge on the plate and, on Hubert's departure, dashed down and gobbled a poached egg on the grass, put a bit of buttered toast butter side downwards on my coat, peeled a banana and fled up again to the ticket office, in time to see Hubert peel a green frog. The babies were asleep during this performance and, after trying unsuccessfully to tempt them, Hubert put his foot down hard on the neck of the first-born, who woke up with a jerk, shook himself, yawned, and then ate what he was given.

The last episode that I took part in during 1929 may be worth recording from its sheer absurdity. My companion was standing by me on the ladder. I was sitting at the opening of the ticket office, Maria was sitting on the babies just out of reach of our hands. We were discussing the price to be paid for the ladder to its owner, who stood below and demanded 300 fr. We were doubtful, and I turned to Maria. ' Three hundred Swiss francs, Maria,' I said ; ' what do you think ? Will you nod your head if you agree ? ' That yellow eye grew wider and wider, but the cautious old head never moved. So we agreed to the price by two votes in favour to one abstention, and I believe that Maria is one of those who would always abstain unless the matter had something to do with a wasp.

We naturally looked out with great care for the return of Hubert and Maria in 1930, and on May 24 four honey buzzards sailed north over the site of the old nest. None of them stopped, however, and we had almost given up hope of seeing our old friends when, on June 12, Crees and I were attracted by the continuous swearing of a pair of kestrels that had a family by the Rhone. We went to investigate the cause of the trouble and found certainly two—and, I think, three—large

## *Honey Buzzards*

birds flopping about in the trees by the kestrels' nest. It was very thick, and we had to wait some moments to get a clear sight, then a great dark chocolate creature sailed into full view at twenty yards, and a stage-whispered 'Maria!' came simultaneously from us both. Presently a cock appeared, but neither of us thought at the time that it was Hubert, and for a day or two we were just a little doubtful of Maria's morals. However, by June 16 all was well, for both of them were comfortably established, sunning themselves on their favourite spruces near their old haunt, and if there had been any doubts as to their identity, the telescope soon set them at rest: they were our Hubert and our Maria. Considering the trouble and publicity to which we had subjected them in 1929, their return was a very pretty compliment; but why were they three weeks late? I believe I know the answer to that question, and, indeed, it is the answer to a great many questions connected with honey buzzards: the answer is 'Wasps.' The wasps that year were three weeks late, and honey buzzards have, I think, to time their nesting so that their babies shall be born when the young wasp grub is a tiny yellow morsel they can swallow; the young birds and the young grubs then keep time in growth with each other.

I always took my leave from about July 10 to August 20, and was therefore absent during the babies' infancy, but I saw the earliest stages again, the occupying and decoration with green oak leaves of a nest from which a family of carrion crows had recently flown some sixty feet up in an oak, 100 yards from the nest of 1929. On June 19, as I passed below the nest, Hubert swept low over my head in a kind of demonstration, and the pair then went through a magnificent soaring exhibition, he leading in great solemn circles up into the sky, his white throat, chest and under surface of the wings glistening as he turned in the sun: she following up and up till they were mere specks. Then a long, steady plane back to the nest, he following her down and sailing majestically

## *Honey Buzzards*

round while she settled on what I doubt not was her first egg laid that morning, for from then onwards one of the birds was always sitting. We had witnessed a celebration, and I once had a similar experience with a ringed plover, who, as his wife rose to her feet from what had half an hour before been an empty nest, peeped under her chest and then waltzed across the sand in circles of excitement at the sight of the first egg.

When I left, the two birds were taking their regular turns at sitting and photography only began on my return on August 18, when one baby was about as large as a partridge, white with a few brown feathers, and the other only half its size. At this moment a tragedy unseen by us occurred : the smaller baby disappeared, and though we searched, no trace was ever found. I could not help thinking of Captain Knight's golden eagle film, and also of boxing matches between the honey buzzard babies in 1929. We have not sufficient evidence to condemn, but it may well be that the young creature which appears in a number of these pictures is, if not a murderer, at least an avicide.

Maria treated us to a delightful surprise when photography began in 1930 : she came out in a brand new dress for the occasion. Of course I know that Dresser believed that honey buzzards moult in July and August, but that is an absurdly unromantic explanation of what was clearly a compliment to the photographers ! Moreover, while Maria changed from chocolate éclair to this coffee-cream creation, Hubert's white waistcoat looked exactly the same pattern as the previous year's.

The fixing of the same old fire-escape, hired at the same old price, was no easy matter at a height of sixty feet, and none of these pictures could have been taken but for the determination, ingenuity and perseverance of Crees. The only bough to which he could attach the top of the ladder was ten feet from the nest, so that the photographs do not give the detail that I should wish. Moreover, at this stage of the proceedings



## *Honey Buzzards*

the visits of the parents were extremely short, and except for about four feeds a day the young bird was left to itself, so that a still portrait of the old birds was very hard to obtain. Maria's advice to young H. B. mothers would be, I think, 'Cuddle your babies as much as you like through the cotton-wool stage, but when that is past give them their grubs and leave them alone.'

For a fortnight my breakfast and luncheon were eaten every day by the nest, and Crees kept guard while I was at the office, so that the nest was under observation all day, and we were able to obtain an accurate record of the times and nature of the feeding. Wasp grubs were still the main diet at this later stage, together with a sprinkling of hornet and bumble bee grubs, the nests being brought whole or in halves in the feet of the parents and just handed to the baby, which immediately extracted the grubs itself and then ate the juicier parts of the comb, stamping the dry portions into the floor of the nest. This diet of grubs was varied by a frog every few days. There was a great shortage of wasps in 1930 in the immediate neighbourhood, presumably owing to the scrapping they got in 1929 from these birds and the wet summer, so that the hunting had to be done far from home, apparently in the Jura Mountains, some ten miles away.

Maria, though she did not sit about on the nest, never seemed in any hurry—I have yet to see Maria in a hurry—and showed not the faintest fear of Crees or myself, even when she had seen us a moment before mount the ladder into the hide. She proved that she recognized us both from the previous year by evincing on every occasion her strong dislike of anyone else mounting the ladder, though she would sit on a bough within twenty feet while we noisily fixed up the cameras, entered and emerged from the tent and generally made our presence felt.

Just as in 1929, Hubert was much more suspicious and would hang about for ages, examining the hide and the neighbourhood of the nest

## *Honey Buzzards*

before coming on to deposit his load. Even then he did not close his wings, but poised a moment with pinions pointed to the sky like a young archangel and wafted himself off again like a feather, always with his back to the tent, whereas his spouse turned round and took off deliberately in the face of the camera. Hubert's suspicions were no doubt increased by a 'faux pas' committed by me; Maria had come on during my occupation of the hide, and her visit had been recorded on the film, whereupon I shouted down from the hide to Crees, 'Got her nicely. Any signs of that blighter Hubert.' There was a startled flap just above my head and the offended object of my remarks left his perch just above the tent, where he had been waiting to follow Maria on to the nest.

The scarcity of the chances made the work very exciting. The approach of a meal was always heralded by squeals from the baby, who had the true eye of a hawk, always spotting its parents at a great distance, and it was possible to tell the exact whereabouts of the parent by the direction of the gaze of its child. When Hubert or Maria made their last perch on a tree ten yards away before their final flight to the nest, the baby's shoulders would work up and down in a fury of excitement. The film camera spring was pressed with the right hand the moment the parent passed a slit in the tent on its way to the nest, while the left hand felt for the camera release in the hope of a portrait as it lit.

The hours of feeding were not regular; food was seldom brought before 10 a.m., for, whatever Maria may have been up to in the early hours, Hubert took a bath between seven and eight and spent the next two hours drying and preening himself in the sun. The likeliest time for a feed was between one and three from either parent or both, and from Maria alone between six and seven p.m. The work was, on the whole, evenly divided, but on one particularly fine Sunday Hubert, after producing a wasps' nest at eight a.m., took the rest of the day clean off, while Maria did the marketing: next day Hubert did more than his

## *Honey Buzzards*

share, to make up. On one occasion the birds arrived simultaneously, each with a frog ready skinned ('like you buy them at Lugrin's,' the local Fortnum and Mason's); Hubert politely ceded first place to Maria, while he waited on a bough before presenting his purchase. These were, oddly enough, the only skinned frogs we saw, all the rest being presented dead but with their skins on.

The bumble bee nests, which the baby seemed to enjoy most of all, were full of honey, and the leaves of the nest would stick to its legs as it walked about after its meal. We used to feed it with honey on a stick, and after it had flown succeeded in drawing it back to the nest by whistling and showing it the honey stick. The time between feeds was spent in violent gymnastic exercises; in picking out the remaining down, some of which it swallowed; and in the most elaborate preening and sunning. It always sat, irrespective of the direction of the wind, with its tail to the sun, apparently in order to get as much warmth as possible into the roots of the feathers, and would often assume the most weird attitudes to allow the sun to permeate different parts of its anatomy; it would kneel head down, for instance, for long periods on the last joint of its wings, with its hips raised like a Moslem at prayer, or stretch first one wing and then the other till every feather quivered and stood out from its neighbour. We noticed peculiar rings round the baby's ankles in the latest stages, which were not apparent on the legs of the parents; they may, perhaps, have been due to muscular strain when it was beginning to move about. The eyes of the parents are a brilliant amber, but the eyes of the young right up to the moment of flight are practically black. The reverse is the case with the base of the bill, which has a far wider yellow band in the young than in its parents.

Some mention has already been made of the habit of these birds to decorate the nest with fresh leaves, but the little daily ceremony connected with this practice was only discovered in 1930. After the last



29. HUBERT SHOWING OFF



30. MARIA'S GLEAMING YELLOW EYE



31. HUBERT LANDS LIKE AN ARCHANGEL



32. —AND MARIA LIKE AN ANIMATED LECTERN



33. A FLUTTER OF EXCITEMENT

## *Honey Buzzards*

feed, always given by Maria between six and seven p.m., that lady would retire a short distance to pull off a large sprig of fresh green leaves, generally oak, but sometimes ash ; this she would carry, either in her bill or her claw, to the nest and lay it at the baby's feet. The baby was just as delighted with this bouquet of leaves as with a nestful of wasp grubs ; there were the same excited squeals and quivering of shoulders and, moreover, it played happily with its toy. Away would go Maria and start pulling off another sprig as a second bouquet, the baby following every movement with obvious excitement and delight. She generally lingered a little at the nest when she brought the second sprig, and the two of them would fondle it together before she left. Why were there, on all the occasions that I was present, just two bouquets, and what was their meaning ? They may, of course, have been for use as a fresh carpet, but in such a large nest two sprigs seemed inadequate for that purpose, and, moreover, the nest, thanks to the habit of the baby of walking backwards and evacuating over the edge, was always clean. They can hardly have been to catch the dew, for there were plenty of growing leaves within reach of the baby if it felt thirsty in the night. Judging by what I saw, especially the baby's habit of fondling with its bill leaves growing within its reach, the birds have a taste for fresh green leaves about them, and my own explanation is that she decorated the nest just as we decorate our drawing-rooms. Whatever the cause, from the moment the nest was occupied and before the first egg was laid, until the baby flew, fresh green leaves were added every day, and in some cases were definitely planted on the side of the nest. To me this ceremony of the green leaves, conducted in the half-light of a summer evening, with the birds' heads against the sky, was the most impressive of all the scenes we witnessed, and I remember feeling as I climbed down the ladder very shy and not a little frightened ; I had surprised the fairies playing in the wood.

## *Honey Buzzards*

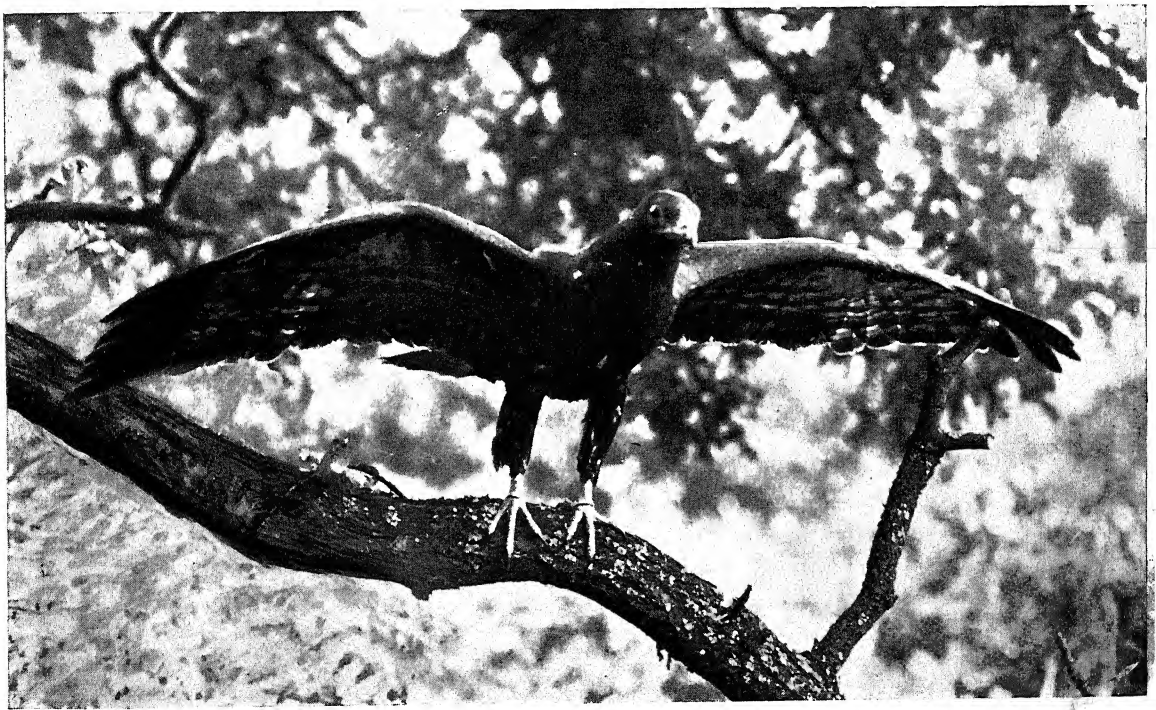
The measures taken to induce the young bird to fly seemed rather brutal ; six days before it actually made its first flight no food was given it all day till after five p.m. The baby, however, made no move, and normal feeding was then resumed for five days, when the starvation experiment was repeated, this time successfully. After much hesitation, like a diver before his first plunge into cold water, it sailed off some twenty yards to a bough, and during the day made a number of trial flights to and from the nest. For several days the parents continued to bring the food to the nest, and called the baby back from the neighbouring trees to feed at the home table, probably because it was not yet able to balance on its perch on one foot while holding the wasps' nest in the other. On one occasion Maria had to make use of all sorts of cajoling expressions, which we had never heard before, to induce it to return for dinner. When it was sufficiently skilled at balancing on one foot, the process was reversed and it was encouraged *away* from the nest to receive its food elsewhere. During all this period, when flying practice was the main business, the pupil appeared to be kept distinctly short of food. The first short flight was made on September 5, and the whole family apparently left for good on September 14.

In 1931 the gulley was visited on the date when the buzzards had first been seen in 1929, and there, sitting on their favourite group of firs, was Maria. The glass showed that her neck feathers were erected, but when I said good morning to her she paid me the compliment of slowly lowering her hackles. Hubert was seen soon afterwards, but perhaps because there was no convenient crow's nest for the purpose in the gulley they changed their position and nested within about a hundred yards of the house at the top of a tall oak on a steep bank. Try as we would, we could get no ladder up to the nest owing to the steepness of the bank, and to the fact that there were no strong branches near enough to the nest to support the top of the ladder : this was a grievous disappointment, for





34. THE BABY GETS ITS FIRST BROWN FEATHERS

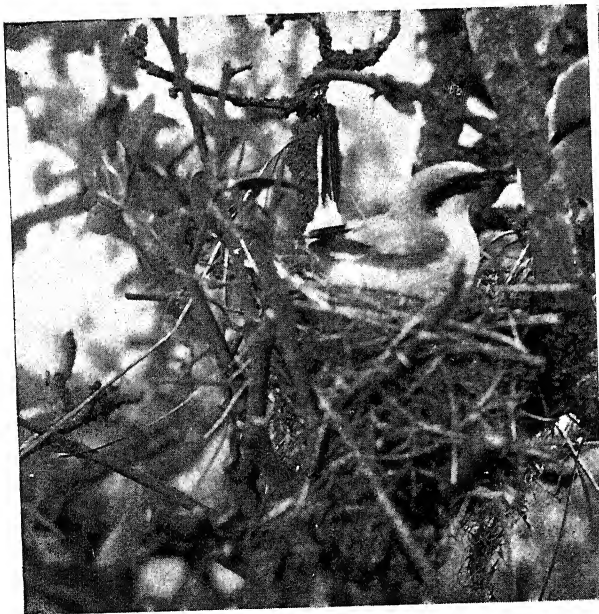


35. THE BABY TAKES THE PLUNGE





36. RED-BACKED SHRIKE  
*'Wherever thou sittest, sit on the top'*



37. GREAT GREY SHRIKE—COCKING THE TAIL  
 LIKE A DOG



38. INSPECTING THE NEST

## *Honey Buzzards*

the birds of course remembered us and were remarkably tame ; moreover the nest was right at the top of the tree in perfect light. For all I know it was a disappointment to Maria too, not to have the hide by her nest, hear the click of the camera, and see us at close range, interesting ourselves in her doings. From the top of the bank above, an excellent view could be had of all that went on in the nest, and in August I had the pleasure of seeing the twins just after they began to fly, but when the nest was still used as a dining-room table. The young cock was very white on the head with black spectacles, grey back and white breast with dark brown streaks. His sister was darker, but also with a white band on the head. One day, while I was watching the nest, the young cock was perched twenty yards away and the young hen on the nest, when both birds began to whistle—sure sign that one of the parents was about to arrive. Presently in swept Maria just over my head with a wasp's nest ; her son hurried back to join his sister and the two were on the nest when Maria landed between them. For the next five minutes the twins went for each other with beak and claw, squealing loudly, wings aloft ; then in the ' worry ' the wasps' nest parted in two and they each took their portion to devour the grubs. When they began to fly, the young were much bullied by crows and we used to see them scurrying home over the open to find shelter from their oppressors in the wood.

In 1931 there was a regular invasion of honey buzzards, and I came to know something of six or seven pairs. The nearest neighbours to Hubert and Maria apparently lived about two miles off, and the cock, a very beautiful bird with yellow streaks on his breast, which reminded me of the young cock of 1929, used to play in the air with Hubert, and we wondered whether they were really father and son. This playing was a beautiful thing to see ; the two birds would plane round together high up in the sky, and then at a given moment they would throw up

## *Honey Buzzards*

their heads, check their flight, raise their wings till they almost touched above their backs, and quiver all over their bodies.

Another pair that looked by their plumage to be immature birds gave us a long hunt before we discovered the nest. It was quite low in an oak, was very badly constructed and placed on a most inadequate bough as support. The behaviour of the birds seemed to show that they were quite inexperienced and ignorant in the matter of nesting, and in fact no eggs were laid and the birds at last abandoned the site. We came to the conclusion that they were a young couple that were playing at nesting, and were not sufficiently mature to breed.

The individuals of all the pairs we knew differed greatly from each other and were comparatively easy to recognize. None of them could possibly have been mistaken for Hubert and Maria ; none had as white a chest as he, none were so dark in colour as she. One cock had a white chest with small longitudinal dark streaks all over it ; another had a breast like a cuckoo ; a third was coloured rather like a kestrel. One of the hens was much the colour of a hen grouse from the Grampians, a second had a rich yellow chest, a third was rather an ugly mottled brown.

Naturally all this company of wasp hunters insured the canton against any fear of a wasp plague, and it was a mystery how they found sufficient wasps' nests to supply their needs. We learnt a good deal from one pair about their method of hunting ; it may be described as ' sitting on a log.' A buzzard would take up its station in a tree on the edge of a wood with a wide field of view, and just sit quite still watching all the open country ; when a wasps' nest or a frog was discovered it would plane quietly down and alight by its prey. Switzerland, with its orchards surrounding every village on the plain, owes much to the honey buzzards, for the wasps can never be allowed to get out of hand.

Will these pictures do what I should like them to do ? Will they

## *Honey Buzzards*

persuade those to whom the pheasant and the partridge are sacred birds to stay the hands of their keepers from destroying, as they have destroyed, everything with a hooked beak and a sharp claw, without bothering to find out how they gain a living? Surely a bird that comes all the way from Africa to eat ninety thousand of our wasps in a season is worth something better than a charge of powder and shot.

## SHRIKES

IN GENEVA we go three no-trumps in shrikes (great grey, red-backed and woodchat)—and make them, with the chance of an extra trick in the lesser grey. We might have made that extra trick in 1931 had not the bird in question trespassed on the property of a great grey and been sent about his business, both by that pugnacious creature and by a whole horde of woodchats which were passing through at the same moment. It would have been a trick worth making, for the lesser grey, apart from other pleasing features, has a rose-coloured stomach, which is not a thing to be lightly disregarded. Anyhow, it is of no use crying over spilt milk ; we got on to terms of intimacy with three out of the four, and even if we had succeeded with the fourth, a rose-coloured stomach is the sort of thing which leaves a camera absolutely cold.

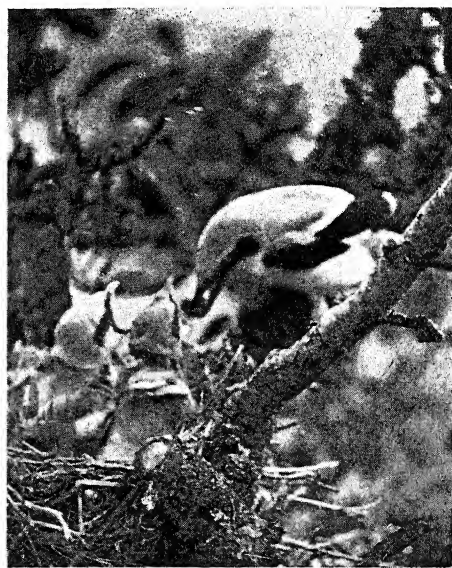
I do not know what are the special features imputed to shrikes by those who deal in specimens, but anyone who watches the live birds will at once notice a trick common to them all. They follow religiously the family motto : ‘ Wherever thou sittest, sit on the top.’ The top will be preferably a telegraph wire, but if that is not available the top of a poplar or pear tree, the top of a bush, the top of a post, or the top of a hay rake will all do equally well. The point is that it must be the top—a point on which the stonechat-whinchat family also insist, though they prefer a top that is rather low. Another common characteristic of all the shrikes known to me is that they *can* make rather nice noises, but seldom do ; they can also make nasty noises, and often do. All their nests look rather rough-and-ready on the outside, but have extremely neat and comfortable interiors. Whether they all keep ‘ larders ’—*i.e.* special thorn bushes on which they impale their prey—I am not certain, and am



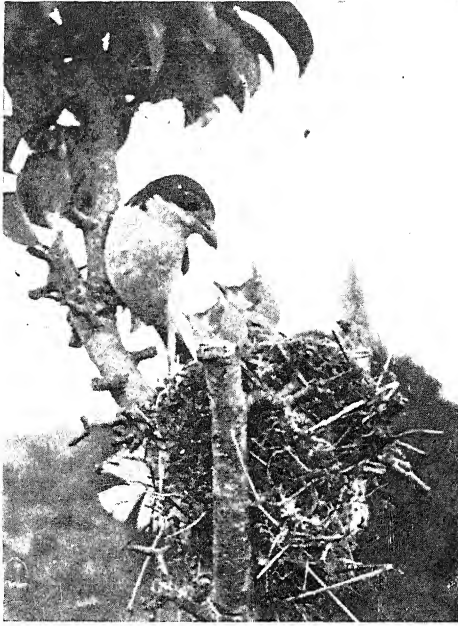
39. GREAT GREY SHRIKE—AN IMPATIENT BABY



40. THE BABY COUGHING UP A PELLET



41. PASSING THE PELLET



42. THE COCK WOODCHAT IGNORES—



43. —HIS FAMILY'S DEMANDS



44. HEN FEEDING WITH A HORSE FLY



45. FEEDING WITH A GRASSHOPPER

## *Shrikes*

inclined to the view that some individuals of all the kinds keep a larder, but that there is no absolute obligation to do so. They all have the cheek of the devil, and any amount of pluck behind it. So much for shrikes in general. Now for shrikes in particular and, to start with the largest of the family, the great grey.

When I first saw a picture of a great grey, with his name underneath it, I imagined a creature about the size of a crow. As a matter of fact he can hardly weigh as much as a thrush, and then is mostly head and tail. Round Geneva you can see him all through the year sitting about on various 'tops' in the plain—always solitary in the winter, and pairing up at the end of February or the beginning of March. This winter solitude has convinced me that each great grey, whether cock or hen, must have a separate winter property, on which it brooks no trespass from others of its kind. No doubt sometimes two adjoining properties are amalgamated by an engaged couple in the spring, as in Lord Grey's story of the robins. The great grey can do one thing which, so far as I know, no other shrike—and, indeed, no other bird but a kestrel—can do : he can hover for long periods in exactly the same spot in the air. That was, in fact, the usual method employed by the shrikes in these illustrations for inspecting our hide in a pear tree, and a great grey hovering in the sunlight is a very pretty sight.

I found altogether nine grey shrikes' nests in the spring of 1931, five of them in a clump of mistletoe on a pear tree, one in a poplar, two in fairly tall oaks, and one in a low thorn bush. Nearly all those found in April were taken by magpies, and the young grey shrikes that get safely launched into the world in the Canton of Geneva seem nearly always to belong to second broods, reared when the leaf is fully on.

At first these particular individuals were difficult subjects. Though they took kindly to the hide, which stalked its way from tree to tree across



## *Shrikes*

a wheatfield till, at the end of ten days, it landed mysteriously within three feet of their nest, they hated the click of the so-called silent shutter, and they loathed the whirr of the film. For three mornings we swore at each other from dawn to breakfast ; then one Saturday I thought I detected the first signs of tolerance—they seemed to jump a little less—and on the Sunday, when we sat them out from seven a.m. till five p.m., all fear had vanished : we clicked the camera and we reeled the film, and they went about their business as if these noises were the most natural thing in the world.

The feeding was in rushes, with long intervals for sleep between : 9-10, six visits ; 12-1, two visits ; 3-4, four visits, and none of your heel-taps, but proper mouthfuls every time. The food was all mole crickets—a nasty pest that saws off roots of vegetables and is preyed upon by hoopoes as well as by shrikes. From the stories we had heard, we expected the callow young of other birds to be rammed down the throats of the shrikes ; but it was mole crickets, mole crickets, mole crickets every time. The first day we started photography we found what appeared to be a single hare's dropping in the nest. While I was in the hide, one of the parents removed this object, and we were puzzled to know why or how it had been put there, and why it was later removed. The mystery was solved next day ; one of the babies showed signs of sickness, and presently produced from its throat a ' pellet,' which was an exact imitation of a hare's dropping. The next day a parent was feeding one of the three babies with mole cricket when her attention was called to No. 2, who was choking up a pellet. She picked it from his mouth and was about to depart when No. 3, feeling hungry, jogged her elbow and demanded food. She turned and rammed the pellet from No. 2 down the throat of No. 3, who accepted it with joy. One of the babies obviously needed attention during another visit of its parent. She looked thoroughly pleased at the timeliness of her arrival, awaited her

## *Shrikes*

moment, and actually caught the dropping before it touched the nest. For neat, quick work in the nursery, give me a great grey shrike.

On one occasion the parent that we took to be the cock, owing to its larger size and smarter appearance, whistled from the nest a pleasant soft single note to call its mate ; but the usual sounds were the ringing scream, not unlike that of a swift, and the grating swear that no shrike can forgo. When the parents met at the nest they cocked their tails up over their backs like a couple of dogs. The little shrikes, after the manner of orioles, climbed out of the nest when their tails were still quite short and before they could fly. They were ferocious little beasts and swore like mad at the camera and the photographer's hand at this stage, retreating backwards up the branch with open beak and sparkling eye.

The woodchat, which is the smallest of the three, with markings of black, chestnut, grey and white, is a bird of the orchards. We had an orchard, but we had no pear trees and no telegraph wires or poles in it, and therefore, though woodchats came through it every spring, they moved on till they found an orchard with pear trees and their beloved wires. They seem to enjoy, moreover, village life and the presence not only of human beings but of cows—in fact, anything to attract the largest form of horse-fly, on which they feed themselves and their babies. Every woodchat's nest that I have seen has been in a pear tree, and generally near the top of it ; the nest shown in these pictures was at the very top of it and unpleasantly near a live wire. In the same orchard was another pair, who, having had bad luck, were building again, and it was amusing to see the cock twiddling his stomach round and round on a mossy branch to make a round cup for the base of the nest. Woodchats have a delightful motion of the tail from side to side, with an upward movement in the middle of the swing and a slight check at each end of it, not unlike the tail movements of the cat tribe.

Shrikes are by nature pugnacious, but I think this little creature is

## *Shrikes*

the fiercest of them all, at any rate with a film camera. The first day we started operations, the cock charged our apparatus repeatedly ; there would be a whirr of little wings off the telegraph wire and a sharp smack on the tent just by my head, within an inch or two of the camera. He would sometimes hit the camera itself, but his object seemed to be not so much to hurt it as to drive it away. I imagine that his main objection was to the noise, for his own swear note is just like a film that keeps sticking and is not working correctly. I also saw him charge with complete success a jay which invaded the orchard ; and, though that bird must have known of the woodchat's nest, which was, I fear, much exposed by our operations, no harm was done and I had the pleasure of seeing all the family out for a fly with their parents after we had finished with them. On one hot day we provided them with an extra branch to act as a parasol.

The food brought to the nest was more varied than that of the grey shrikes ; apart from the horse-flies which formed the main part of the meal, the hen came about every half-hour with a large green grasshopper, while the cock, perhaps because he disliked carrying weight, handed in very small insects. The grasshoppers looked to me much too big for comfort, and, in fact, they would not go down the baby's throat unless it received them head first with folded wings. We expected that they would be always delivered in this position, but not at all ; they were put into the gaping mouths anyhow and picked out again by the mother if taken in the wrong position, until, as it seemed, by a mere fluke and after many attempts the head went down first, when, with a look of extreme satisfaction, the parent would watch till the little bill closed on the grasshopper's wings and then fly away for more. These babies produced pellets similar to but much smaller than those of the grey shrikes.

The woodchats' nest, which was the neatest and prettiest of the three, was gaily decorated with feathers inside and out, and these birds

give the impression of being very particular about appearances ; even the babies always looked immaculate in their soft grey suits of barred young feathers. I have never understood why this bird, the golden oriole and the icterine warbler, all of them common enough in the north of France, so seldom cross the Channel. The goodly orchards round a Kentish village ought to be full of woodchats ; perhaps they do not contain enough horse-flies or grasshoppers.

There should be no need for a detailed description of the red-backed shrike, for most people who live in the south of England should have seen him. I hear he was short in numbers in England in the summer of 1931, and I am not surprised, for the quantity that stopped and nested on the plains of Geneva was simply amazing. If the Swiss telegraph system had broken down, it would have been from the weight of red-backed shrikes on the wires ; and there was grave danger of the magpies all dying of a surfeit of shrike babies. The food of these babies consisted of green grasshoppers and all sorts of flies, beetles and caterpillars—the most varied diet of all. The nest is usually in a bush rather than in a tree, and many are placed at Geneva at less than three feet from the ground.

The hen red-back is remarkable for being the only ugly shrike, and what on earth he sees in her heaven only knows. She is as ugly as sin, and almost as ugly as a corn bunting, a bird which, thank heavens, we did not keep at Geneva. Not only is she ugly, she is also dowdy, and seems to know it, for while he sits on the top like a proper shrike, she creeps about at a lower level and hides her unbecoming face in a bush. You may plead that she is a worthy woman, a good mother, and all that, and should be included in these family portraits, but I doubt if those are the qualities one wants in a bird : anyhow, for one reason or another, she has been left out.

Red-backed shrikes seem to me to be the best-tempered of the three ;

## *Shrikes*

that is not to say they never swear ; they do—loud, often, and through the nose ; but they do not charge at sight as readily as their cousins, and seem less annoyed at the presence of other birds. It is a pity that they cannot be persuaded to sing a little more, for when they first come in the spring their warbles, though nothing in volume, are pleasant to the ear.

Which is the best-looking of the three ? It is unfair to judge by photographs alone, for background counts for much and the taste of the photographer for something. In my opinion, the great grey is the most impressive, the woodchat the daintiest, and the red-back (wives excepted) the best in colour blends.

# WOODPECKERS

*and in particular*

## THE SPOT-LIGHT PECKER

GENEVA IS extremely rich in woodpeckers. Green and greater spotted are so common that on the property of about a hundred and fifty acres where I lived, there were often ten pairs of both, with perhaps one pair of lesser spotted and one pair of middle spotted. The latter bird, which does not come to England, is the most beautiful of the three spotted woodpeckers at Geneva. It has a brilliant red crown, and prettily marked breast, and is at least one size smaller than a greater spotted. The best way to distinguish it is by the weird cat-call in the spring, a sound quite unlike any other woodpecker's call and the ugliest bird-note I have ever heard. The nearest approach to it is perhaps the cry of a peacock, but it might well be made by a baby in pain. It is in any event a sound that gets on the nerves, and I do not recommend a pair of these creatures nesting too near the house, which they are rather prone to do, for they prefer old orchards to thick woods.

On the slopes of the Jura and the Alps lives the largest and noisiest of the family, the great black woodpecker. No bird rejoices more in the power of its voice to announce the advent of a human being, and no bird is quicker to detect that biped's presence, as I used to find to my cost when after wild boar. It seems impossible to escape the creature's eye or ear, and discovery is at once announced by a ringing clarion that echoes for miles. It is a grand sound, but I used to curse its authors when on the fresh track of some of those elusive pig. The bird has a

## *Woodpeckers*

habit of climbing to the top of a tall fir and then dropping like a bit of black crêpe to the lower part of another tree. Another noisy inhabitant of the same country is the nutcracker, which is a sort of melanistic jay. A stuffed nutcracker looks rather a dull bird, but if you catch him in full sunlight on the top of an old Scotch fir he fits pleasantly into his surroundings and has a smart and attractive tail and telling white flecks on his feathers. In habits and in note he is very jay-like, but the voice is even harsher than that of his brighter-coloured cousin.

To get back to the woodpeckers, there are in one or two places on the plain and usually close to a marsh a few of that peculiar creature which I have called the spot-light pecker. The official title of this creature is the grey-headed green woodpecker, but not even the best bird is entitled to seven syllables, and I have therefore reduced him to four and given him a name that picks out his main feature—the crimson patch on his forehead, which shows dark in the illustrations. It was only in 1930 that I discovered the presence of the spot-light pecker at Geneva, and he is by no means common in the district ; I gather that his main home is farther east.

While fishing on a river, which, in its upper reaches, divides France from Switzerland, I heard a note that sounded like a green woodpecker gone soft in the head. Instead of the cheery, genuine laugh of that bird, it was an affected drawl in five or sometimes in three syllables, made as though the bird was slightly drunk or merely pretending to be amused. I took no notice at first, but the silly laugh was repeated again and again until at last, partly out of annoyance and partly out of curiosity, I approached its author and got a glass on him as he sat hammering at an old dead stump. Annoyance changed at once to admiration, for there, in full sun, was a brilliant creature that I had never seen before—or, in fact, heard anything about. The whole plumage was intensely smooth and glossy, the head bluish grey rather than green, with a brilliant



46. THE COCK SPOTLIGHT PECKER





47. THE HEN SPOTLIGHT PECKER

## *Woodpeckers*

crimson patch on the forehead, a keen amber eye, and two black marks to give distinction, one between the eye and bill and the other a streak running back from the mouth above the yellow throat. The back was much the same colour as a green woodpecker, with the same yellow rump and the same tessellated pattern on the primaries ; the size, perhaps half way between that bird and a greater spotted. The illustration in Dresser must have been taken from some poor old mummy that had lain in a drawer for years, for it gives no idea of the brilliance or the delicate shades of colour that the real bird displays. The hen lacks the crimson patch, but otherwise is almost as brightly coloured as her lord. She, too, has the same absurd laugh, but, so far as I could tell, seldom prolonged it beyond three syllables.

Once the note was learnt, I discovered two or three other pairs within a few miles of the same spot, frequenting the country on either side of the marshes ; but, owing to my pair changing their original nesting site, I failed to get on terms of real intimacy with them till 1931. A pair were found in early April occupying the same property as a pair of green woodpeckers, and the nesting holes of both were discovered in the making. Again, however, my friends changed their minds, and their nest here depicted was only found some weeks later, after a great deal of watching and listening. Like most woodpeckers, the spot-light is as noisy as you please until he gets down to real business ; then all that laughing stops, he plays hide-and-seek with you round the tree trunks, and glides on to his nesting tree when you are not there to see.

France has acquired an unenviable reputation in regard to birds, which the country as a whole does not deserve. No doubt it is true that in the south every sort of creature is caught for the pot in all manner of ways, but that is not the case either in the north, or on the east near the Swiss border. This particular pair of woodpeckers nested on the French side of the border in an old rough fence by the side of a marsh,

## *Woodpeckers*

and to show the amount and variety of bird life in their immediate vicinity I give a rough list of the birds settled within, roughly, two hundred yards of their home : carrion crow, magpie, jay, honey buzzard, kestrel, golden oriole (two pairs), wood-pigeon, stock dove, turtle dove, blackbird, blackcap, common whitethroat, garden warbler, icterine warbler, chiffchaff, nightingale (two pairs), grasshopper warbler, marsh warbler, great grey shrike, red-backed shrike (innumerable), chaffinch, black-headed bunting, yellow-hammer (innumerable), tree pipit, skylark, woodlark, wryneck, common redstart, marsh tit (same tree), great tit, blue tit, moorhen, water rail, corncrake, dabchick, green woodpecker, greater spotted woodpecker, another pair of spot-lights. I have, no doubt, forgotten a few, but, in any case, hats off to France for such a collection in such a small area. Our tent, an extremely obvious and hideous construction, stood for a month in various positions near and by the nest. It was seen by numbers of people at work in the fields, all of whom took a lively interest in our proceedings ; the tent was never touched, the birds were never interfered with, and we were always asked by the people at work near the nest what luck we had had with our photography and how the ' *Pic cendré* ' family were getting on. You may leave a tent by a rare creature with equal confidence in Switzerland ; but are there many other countries where the inhabitants are so interested in, and at the same time so kindly to, the birds ?

As a subject for photography I can highly recommend the spot-light pecker. From the very first day the cock gave us his confidence. Just once there was a little shiver as the shutter closed at three feet, but he stood his ground and went about his business, and afterwards neither the snap of the shutter nor the reeling of the film caused him the smallest worry. She was a little more nervy, but I think it was her job in the mornings to be on guard and his to feed the babies, so that a few signs of anxiety on her part about the different noises was only right and proper.

## *Woodpeckers*

He would generally visit the nest at intervals of about forty minutes, she remaining on guard while he went foraging for ants' nests.

His manner of feeding the babies, when they first began to show at the entrance, was well suited to film photography. There would be a warning of the cock's approach from the hen—a single soft 'Tchook,' a whirr of wings, and he would alight three feet below the nest, head up and tail depressed on the bark. Then a few jerky steps in the typical woodpecker style up to the hole, where he would apparently address the family: 'Your turn first, Wilfred,' or 'Amelia,' or whoever it was. That done he would descend discreetly out of sight of the children, but well into the middle of the film picture, and the man in the hide, if he had never seen it before, would wonder what was going to happen next. The bird would look concentrated and rather depressed, much as people look in the early stages on a rough day in the Channel. Then there would be a gulp in the throat, just time for the watcher in the hide to call 'Steward!' but no time for the steward to cross the deck and be of any use, when up with a few jerky steps would go the pecker with a returned dose on his bill of ants' eggs in vanilla cream, just sufficient for one baby. The parent's bill would be placed closed in the open bill of the baby, who would suck and scrape off its portion. Then down again would come its parent to repeat the process five times for the five members of his family.

The performance was carried out so methodically that if the whole was to be recorded on the film, re-winding was always required, and a single visit ate up at least forty feet. After the fifth baby had been fed from the fifth turn of sickness the parent would enter the nesting hole to clean up, occasionally looking out of his front door during the process. I expected that his final departure from such a cramped position would take time, but, as a matter of fact, he shot out so quickly from the hole that it was necessary to have the film going full steam ahead when his

## *Woodpeckers*

face appeared in order to record the flight. On one occasion the neighbouring pair of spot-lights came to call on our friends, after the fashion of golden orioles, and much conversation occurred just outside the hide, from which I gathered that the visiting pair were discouraged from looking at the family.

My companion got a record of the last remaining baby looking out on the world to which his brothers and sisters had already gone, but he hesitated too long to give a picture of his actual departure. Several days later we found the whole party talking happily to each other from the oaks and other trees about their late home.



48. 'HULLO, WHO'S THAT?'

49. A FLEXIBLE NECK

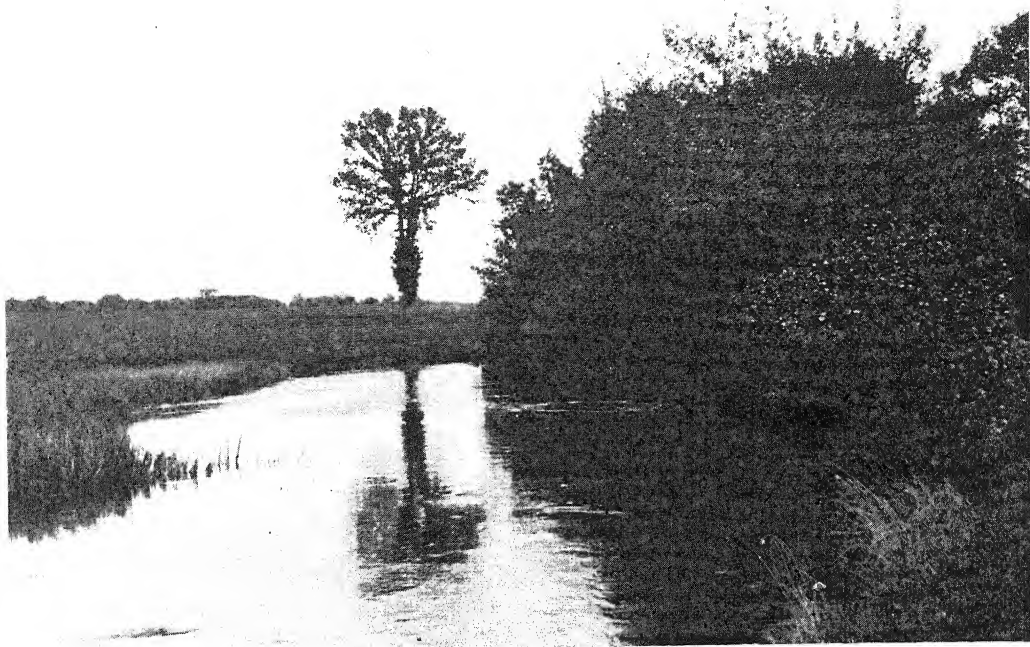


50. THE COCK ABOUT TO BE—

51. SICK

52. —TO FEED THE BABY





*M. Sanasen*

53. A WELL-POACHED STRETCH OF THE VERSOIX



*M. Sanasen*

54. M. HENRI STAUBER

## FISHING

FISHING AT Geneva is, above all else, democratic: Through the private park where I lived, for instance, anyone could pass so long as he followed the river bank, and could prove that he was there for the purpose of fishing; the same rule applies to all property in this and the neighbouring cantons. Fishing is continuous on the main bridges of the town from January 1 till October, but only with a hand line in deference to passing hats, which would otherwise no doubt be flicked into the Rhone by a cast minnow or fly. The cost of an annual fishing licence is eight Swiss francs in the Canton of Geneva, and about forty Swiss francs in the neighbouring Canton of Vaux, where the rivers are certainly superior, and these licences give the right to fish in any water in the canton with the exception of certain reserves very limited in area. The commonest bait is minnow or worm and hundreds of the local anglers never aspire to the fly, though they are experts particularly with a weighted minnow, that can in skilled hands be poked and jerked under any root and into all sorts of holes and corners quite unreachable with a fly. In addition, there are a more limited number of fly fishermen, a few of whom are real experts, wet or dry. The result is, of course, the survival of the fittest, that is of the most intelligent trout and of them alone, for no fool of a fish can hope to withstand such a daily bombardment from legitimate fishermen, coupled with frequent nightly dangers in the shape of baited night lines and nets. The authorities, perhaps with a view to encouraging a good return from fishing licences, turn out a good number of young fish each year, so that there is never any real danger of extermination, and it is, moreover, surprising how many of the older fish survive, particularly in quiet, clear and difficult water.



## *Fishing*

Fortunately for members of the League Secretariat who were keen on fishing, the best river in the whole district could be reached by a car in twenty-five minutes from the office, so that it was just possible to catch a trout in the luncheon interval, if lunch were a secondary consideration and you did not mind where or how fast you changed your clothes. This fact was duly appreciated by us, but not I fear by the local anglers who had enjoyed comparative solitude in the good old days before the international official took up his abode at Geneva, and brought his fishing rod with him. A number of these local anglers are friends of mine, and to insure that nothing I write shall further disturb their peace by encouraging a fresh invasion of interlopers, it shall be confessed at once that the largest number of trout I ever caught in a day on this river was eight, and that on a perfect evening in the height of the May-fly season, when every big trout was sucking in spent gnat with a 'glok' that could be heard a hundred yards. For the rest you wrote home to your mother if you caught a brace, and told all your friends if you caught anything at all, which happened seldom enough. Nevertheless, the trout were there, marked down not only in the river but also, after the manner of battleships in a plan of Trafalgar, on a map kept by the Secretary of the Secretary General in the office. Not only were they marked, they were named. There was, for instance, a certain corner inhabited by Moses, Aaron, and (because no one could remember the name of Aaron's son) by Ham. Somewhere about 1924, I actually caught Moses in the dark, and he was big enough to fall out of the Secretary General's basin, where I had laid him during dinner, on to the Secretary General's floor. Ham was caught, much to my annoyance, by a British General from whom I thought he was safe, and I caught him again two years later. Aaron fell in 1929, during a thunderstorm, to a local doctor who was very skilled with a fly rod, and Moses got a jab in the mouth the same day, but escaped without serious injury, and is still

there ; so is Aaron and so is Ham, for, in accordance with one of the best of all Nature's rules, if a big trout is gathered to his fathers, another shall reign in his stead. So long as the Versoix flows round that bend, where the wood comes jutting into the marsh right to the river's bank, there will, it is good to know, be just those three, Moses, Aaron and Ham, all in line in that order rising majestically in exactly the same places, but discriminating with conscious ability between the real thing and its imitation. All the local fishermen knew them, but some of them did not know their names. 'Have you seen Moses this morning?' I asked a Swiss. 'I am not sure,' he said; 'I know your friend by sight, but I am doubtful of his name. He is fishing up the left bank.' Then there was 'Barboza,' who, we always hoped and expected, would be accompanied by a nameable brother, but he never was. 'Barboza' was never caught, and so far as I know never rose at any fly, natural or artificial. He was always grubbing about on a patch of weed and is believed to have died of starvation, owing to his determination not to make a mistake. The whole river was peopled with personages of political importance and vast intelligence.

These Versoix trout, whatever their names, had two peculiarities ; they rose from the bed of the stream like a sea-trout instead of 'cocking up' near the surface like brown trout normally do during a rise, and secondly, they were nearly all barred like a salmon parr, irrespective of the age they had attained. This peculiar barring was a feature of the trout in one or two other rivers in the neighbourhood, but not by any means in all. The trout of the Ain, for instance, which flows down the western side of the Jura, were not the least the same colour as the Versoix trout, having very small spots and being much yellower to match the gravel bottom and pale coloured rocks, but their bars were even more distinct and more universal. No one seeing them in the water would have suspected that they were trout at all, for they looked far

## *Fishing*

more like perch. There were grayling as well in the Ain, but they, though much the same golden yellow as the trout, showed no signs of a bar. I have never found a satisfactory reason for this coloration, but it may possibly be due to the fact that both in the Versoix and in the Ain the trout live much under ground—in holes under the bank in the Versoix and under rocks in the Ain : if a trout was in sight at all, it usually meant that he was on the look-out for food. This peculiar marking made the fish in the Versoix extremely invisible, for it completely broke up their outline and most of the people who fished there could seldom spot them on the bottom.

I once took out fishing Mr. Wellington Koo, who then represented China on the Council of the League. He had read Lord Grey's book and had fished in the sea, but he did not know what he was in for on the Versoix and appeared in tennis flannels and white shoes, which quickly turned to the colour of peat when we entered the flooded marshes. We wandered up the river together looking for fish, and as I rather fancy myself at spotting trout and enjoy pointing them out to people who have never seen them before, I hoped to be able to give Mr. Wellington Koo a few hints on what to look for. When we had gone some way my companion, who was behind me, stopped and, pointing to a place I had carefully examined, asked, 'Is that a fish?' I looked, expecting the inevitable weed, but not a bit of it. It *was* a trout, and one of the tiniest trout in the river, glued to a piece of shingle exactly its own colour. That was the first trout that he had ever seen in its natural surroundings, and I doubt if any other statesman in the world could have made such a brilliant spot. I wiped my eye and we went on and caught five fish, and returned to Geneva triumphant, with the white trousers stained to a peaty black. Lest there be any sign of departure from complete impartiality, I would say that I also enjoyed the company on the Versoix of M. Matzudaixa, the Japanese Ambassador in London. I cannot

remember that he spotted any trout, but he looked rather more like catching one than Mr. Wellington Koo.

Owing probably to snow water, the Versoix was extremely disappointing during the early spring except in very cold weather when frost in the mountains ensured clear water, and indeed until the May-fly season began in the middle of May ; then there was a dead month after the May-fly and sedge which unfortunately coincided and constituted an *embarras de richesse*, after which small dun greatly increased so that the fishing in July, August and September was, comparatively speaking, much better than on most rivers at that time of year. The best chance of all was a day of steady rain and clear water late in the season, which generally produced a big hatch of duns, for though more big fish disclosed their presence in the May-fly, they nearly always did so by plunging at nymphs. The Versoix, though not a chalk but a granite stream, rises like a chalk stream as a full river gurgling out of the foot of the Jura, gin clear except when coloured by snow or very heavy rain. The Jura is a porous range of mountains through which the water sinks at once and there are hardly any burns and few springs on its sides. The resulting river therefore resembles a chalk stream in its upper reaches, where it wanders for four miles through a wild marsh, often overflowing its banks and covering the whole marsh with water a foot deep. This flood water, which in the summer is often luke-warm in contrast to the icy coldness of the river itself, makes the stalking of a trout a difficult matter, for however impervious to water it is very difficult for the fisherman to walk or crawl without producing a wave, that ripples across the river and at once puts down the fish.

Some of the local fishermen, notably two Frenchmen, inhabitants of Divonne, used only the wet fly, others both wet and dry as the fancy took them, and the Versoix gave abundant proofs that the man who is tied by prejudice or practice to either the wet or the dry fly is at a great

## *Fishing*

disadvantage. I am inclined to think that if one had fished all the year with a wet fly one would have risen more fish than if one had fished all the year with a dry : I say risen, but it is doubtful if so large a proportion of rises would have ended in kills. The best plan on the Versoix, as on every river, is to go prepared to fish wet or dry as circumstances indicate. The best fisherman on the Versoix, and he would be the best fisherman on most rivers, was my friend M. Henri Stauber, and he was as good with one method as with the other. It is an encouraging fact for those who have no opportunity for fishing when young that M. Stauber acquired his skill comparatively late in life. I believe that he catches more trout on that river than any other fisherman, poachers included.

I cannot claim any great bags of fish on the Versoix, but I did once catch a poacher. I was sitting one evening by a shady reach on the French bank watching for the evening rise when a man came up the Swiss bank fishing. He had obviously not seen me, and presently lay down on his stomach and became busy with his hands about a root. A few yards higher up he repeated the performance and then passed on above me, still unconscious of my presence. I crept away down stream, waded across, found what I expected to find—two night lines attached to the roots—and without touching them, walked up till I overtook my man, and recognized him as an inhabitant of the nearest village and one of the worst fishermen on the river, who had always regaled me with tales of the great trout he had recently slain. I went home at the usual time by the usual route past his house, but turned back to the Customs House and there reported. It was agreed that the chief *Douanier* and I should sit by the night lines from dawn onwards, and there on the following morrow we sat from four a.m. till eight a.m., seeing nothing but one nursery-maid and a baby. The *Douanier* then had to return to open his *Douane*, but promised to send a substitute and breakfast for me, both of which duly arrived. At 9.30 I had to go to the office, but I stalked

out by a circuitous route and was just leaving in the car when there was a shout of triumph and the substitute appeared with the prisoner, who had come five minutes after I had left the scene with his innocent rod in his hands to pick up his lines. He was caught red-handed, fined fifty Swiss francs and ragged unmercifully by the village for all his tales of prowess at fishing, and not least for the luncheons he had given to the *préfet* whenever one of his night lines brought him a big trout, and for his stories to that worthy of how he had stalked, hooked and caught it. Despite the fine and the ragging he received it was obvious, from the little paths to still places where roots afforded convenient tying places for night lines, that this individual renewed his activities in subsequent years, and he was not the only one.

The largest trout on the Versoix whose capture came to my knowledge weighed, I believe, eight or nine pounds, and as he was on the bank by five a.m. there is little doubt how he met his end. The largest trout caught by me weighed  $3\frac{1}{4}$  lbs., but I lost one or two bigger than that—one in particular. I heard him splashing away at May-fly behind a line of bushes, but from my bank there was no hope of reaching him. I ran a mile to the nearest bridge and a mile down the opposite bank, and found him going as hard as ever. I suppose that the right thing would have been to bite off the lower half of the cast, for he was clearly a huge fish and roots and bushes abounded, but I could not wait. He came with a bang at the first cast ; there was a terrible heave, a great rush up stream and under a tangle of strong vegetation, and then the inevitable smash. I had never seen that fish before, and I never saw him again, but the sight of his shoulder as he rolled over the fly haunts me still.

Apart from the actual fishing with its feeling of intense satisfaction on the rare occasions when one of these highly skilled opponents was actually caught, there was a great charm about the surroundings. The Alps and Mont Blanc were in full view to the east, and within a few miles

## *Fishing*

to the west the long dark line of the Jura. Oak woods straggled down to the bank in places and the river wandered through the wildest marsh in the whole plain of Geneva. Bird-life was abundant, and during the singing hours in late spring and summer one was never out of sound of golden orioles, nightingales and a host of other songsters. If the river were preserved it would be one of the finest trout streams in Europe, but on the whole it is best left as it is—the playground of all sorts and conditions of men with the love of fishing strong enough to stand blank days and count a brace a lordly dish. And a lordly dish they are, since the Versoix trout for fighting or for eating can beat any brown trout that have come my way. The Versoix, for all its difficulties and peculiarities, has given me many hours of intense happiness, and is one of my favourite rivers of the world.

There is one other river on the plain of Geneva, where if you are content with smaller fish fair sport is to be had. This is the London, which rises also at the foot of the Jura and runs into the Rhone—a faster stream with light brown rocks and yellow gravel. On those rare occasions when my visit coincided with a hatch of fly, the trout were far easier to catch than on the Versoix, but three-quarters of a pound was a big fish. It was flogged to death, and on holidays there was always the probability of worm fishermen in parties coming straight down the water ahead of you, but I used to take a hurried lunch there on other days, snatch an hour's fishing and dash back to the office, often seeing the first fly hatch as I left the river. The trout in this river are not barred, and are just the colour you would expect, very bright yellow, but not so good to eat as those from the Versoix.

The most prolific river that can be reached from Geneva is the Ain, that rises on the west or French side of the Jura. My headquarters for a week-end on the Ain were generally at Champagnole, where the Grand Hotel keeps three or four miles of good fishing in a deep and



*M. Sanasen*

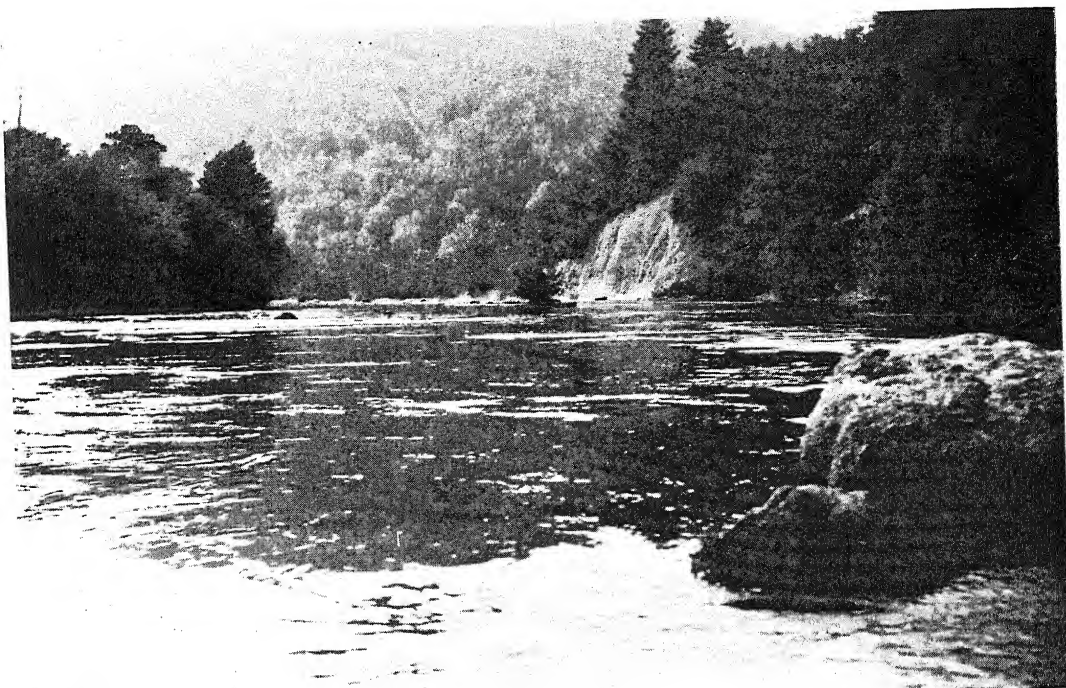
55. THE ABODE OF MOSES, AARON, AND HAM



*M. Sanasen*

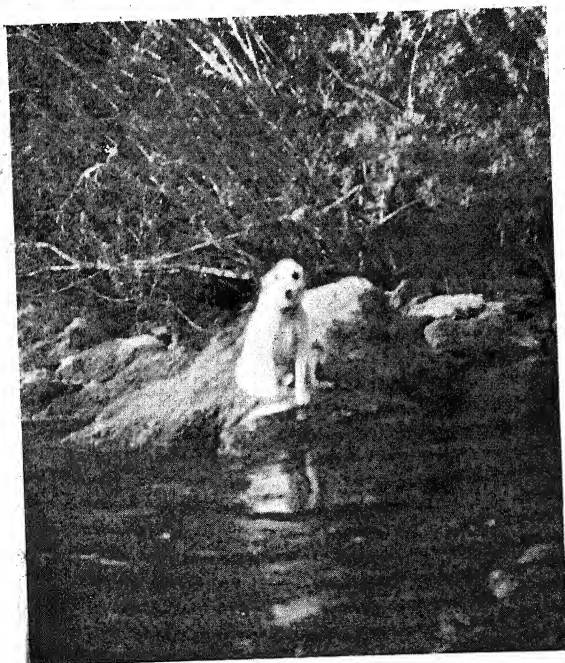
56. THE PONT DE GRILLY (VERSOIX)



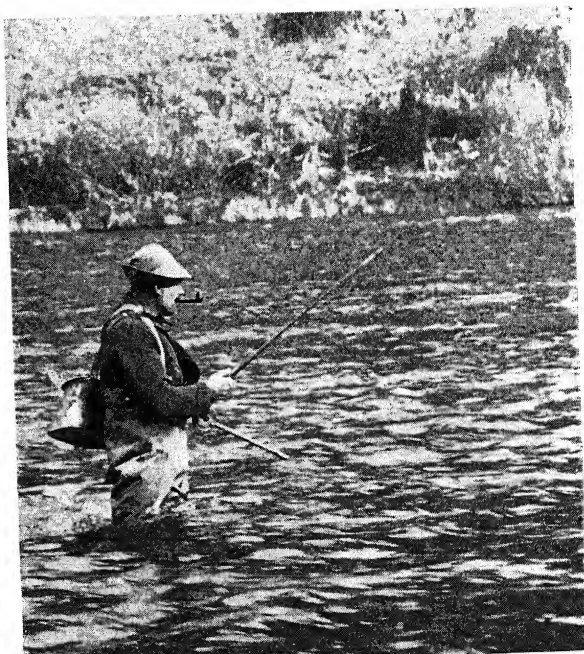


*M. Sanasen*

57. THE WOODED VALLEY OF THE AIN



58. TINKLE WATCHING FOR A RISE



*M. Sanasen*

59. M. MAURICE SIMONET

wooded valley and is very kindly to its guests. A day's fishing at that place was strenuous work, for the paths were almost non-existent, the cover impenetrable and the wading tricky. Often the trout did not rise, but when they did there were plenty and grayling with them. It is not an easy river, for much of it is impossible to reach owing to depth, to trees lining both banks, and to the peculiar formation on its bed which insures a drag in most places. The great feature of it to me was the man who fished for the hotel. He and his family, including his old father, were the clog makers in the little village of Ney, two miles from Champagnole, but in addition to making clogs M. Maurice Simonet made every bit of his fishing tackle except reel line and gut. Without exception he was the best fisherman I have ever seen. His rod, which was rich blue in colour, felt clumsy to me, but he could put out line with it against any wind with trees exactly behind him, and pick a trout out of places no one else would have reached or attempted to reach. It was his job to catch fish, and if fly fishing were out of the question he would use a worm, but his big bags were made with a fly, and usually a dry fly home-made. He always fished up-stream, and one of his chief characteristics was the way he hooked fish at any angle with a wet fly. I have never seen his equal at keeping in touch with a sunk fly travelling down the river towards him, or on the other side of a strong stream.

I have a terrier who goes mad with excitement at the sight of a fishing rod, and still more so at the sound of a rising trout: if you cannot catch it, she keeps up a continuous murmur of reproach. She is not so deadly as a landing net, but she is more amusing to use, and she has retrieved a lot of trout for me. Once when Crees was still a beginner with a fly rod, 'Tinkle' accompanied him, and bored with his lack of success went off on her own. After a considerable interval she returned to lay a freshly caught loach at his feet. On one of my blank days, she placed a mouse on the fishing bag to save at least the appearance

## *Fishing*

of an empty creel. One day on the Ain, Simonet and I were fishing opposite each other, where the stream ran wide, when he hooked a fish. 'Tinkle' dashed in to assist, and swam across. Simonet politely awaited her arrival and she seized his fish in midstream, but she was not going to give it to him, and turned back with the trout in her mouth to my bank. 'Rien pour moi et tout pour le patron,' said Simonet, and started to play her to retrieve his trout. She hung on but eventually landed exhausted on a rock in midstream and then allowed herself, still clinging to her prize, to be wound up to his bank.

On the occasion already alluded to when I caught eight trout on the Versoix an American Senator, the late Mr. Stephen Porter, who was accustomed to fish in more troubled but less difficult waters, was with me. I had wandered far up the marsh with 'Tinkle,' and met Mr. Porter on my return, when the light had practically gone. In a narrow reach heavily timbered and bushed on either bank we heard a rise; 'Tinkle' heard it too and demanded in her usual excited whimper that something should be done about it. Somehow or other the rod was poked out between the bushes and a May-fly spinner flicked towards the place where the trout was judged to be by sound alone, for nothing could be seen. There was a gentle 'plop' and the Senator, 'Tinkle' and myself charged through what he described as the 'sage brush' and out into the open, still attached to the trout. It was not by any means a big fish, but the lateness of the hour and the rush through the bushes had raised all our hackles, and the final scene of that memorable evening was a large Senator and a small fox terrier falling over each other in the marsh in their efforts to worry a half-pound trout.

On a day in April on the Ain, Simonet and I lunched together on the bank at one p.m., when I had caught one trout and he nothing. I fished hard, and as I thought well in the afternoon, and reached the car at six p.m., well content with eleven trout. Simonet was there, sitting

## *Fishing*

by the car, and I asked him why he had stopped fishing so early. 'A quatre heures j'avais fait mon panier. Il n'y avait plus de place,' and he turned out his basket, which was full to the brim with some forty trout all caught on a dry fly. We once took him to another river that he did not know, but the story was the same—he caught nine-tenths of the bag. Apart from the pleasure and the interest in watching him fish, there was no better or more witty companion on a river. He used to talk to the trout as he cast, sometimes coaxingly sometimes reproachfully, but when he hooked a fish he was brutal in the rapidity with which he brought it to the net. He did not fish with very fine gut and believed in a 'bon bout de ligne.' One of his theories was that the most important element in trout fishing is the moon, and that trout will not rise well in the day time when the moon is full, because they then feed so much at night. He knew such a lot about trout and spent so much of his time in their company that there may well be something in this theory. Of the other fishermen that I have met in a class by themselves, one was also a Frenchman who kept an inn at Beussent in the Pas de Calais, one was a Scottish coachman, one was a Norwegian who never used gaff or net, and one was an Englishman who always fished with a grey quill. As a nation I would put France at the top in the fishing line, both in keenness and skill—skill with the worst rods and the worst tackle imaginable. England and America ought, between them, to do a rare trade in supplying worthy hands in other countries with something the local manufacturers have never learnt to produce.

The source of the Orbe, high up in a trough on the west side of the Jura, was well worth a visit in the May-fly season, which occurred at that altitude early in June. Part of the river was very sluggish, covered with weed and infested with pike, but during high water trout and grayling ran up from the Lac de Joux to a short reach of faster water above the pike. There was a great hatch of May-fly, and though the trout were

## *Fishing*

not plentiful, some of them and of the grayling were very big, and weeds made their capture difficult. Both the country and the fish reminded us of Scotland, for there was heather, silver birch, a smell of peat and bog myrtle, and rich brown fish that were by no means good to eat and nothing wonderful to look at. I once caught a fish of two and a half pounds out of this river, and saw a real monster, but for success a good spate was needed coinciding with the May-fly, for in dry weather the water fell too low to hold big fish.

There is an interesting development in fishing to be seen on the Areuse, close to Neufchâtel. The valley is full of recently established factories and many of the hands are fishermen, so that at the week-end the banks of the river are literally lined with rods. The river is clear and in most places rather slow, so that for success real skill is essential, and skill with a cheap rod. The result is dry fly-fishing with home-made rods and no reel, the entire outfit costing I suppose less than five francs. The rod is a long straight pole into which is inserted a whippy top, and in place of a reel are two short pegs fixed into the pole and sloped at an angle of 45 degrees away from each other. Round the pegs the line is wound, and the fisherman on spotting a rise has to estimate the length of line he must first uncoil from the pegs in order to cover his fish. If a large fish is hooked, line has to be uncoiled rapidly to avoid a break, and then rewound on to the pegs. I was one of a party of five on a certain occasion, all fishing for the same fish. A rival on the opposite bank eventually hooked and caught it, a grayling of about two pounds, which was returned with a splash into the river, since grayling were not in season. To hook and kill such a hard fished grayling with such tackle was a real test of skill. That was the only fishing competition in which I have ever engaged, and those who try their hand on the Areuse will be taken down many pegs by the local workmen with their self-made rods.

## *Fishing*

There is a delightful little river called the Dranse which rises in three branches in Haute Savoie that join to fall into the lake by Thonon. Most of the male inhabitants of the valley, however, worm it every day, and the lower reaches are usually coloured by the blue clay banks of one of the three streams. It is no use expecting large fish or a big bag, but the country is charming and the wild flowers make a carpet for your feet.

The Lake of Geneva and the Rhone, particularly the stretch that runs through the town, hold enormous trout, but I only once had any sport with them. Early in May there was sometimes a big hatch of May-fly on the lake, and this was always apparent to fishing members of the Secretariat, for some of the fly would blow in at the windows and the spinners danced over the garden. We considered it our duty to import the first May-fly of the year in a match-box to the Secretary General, as a matter of political importance worthy of his immediate attention. In one year of very low water an exceptional hatch occurred and the spent fly were noticed floating under the Pont de Mont Blanc, the main bridge of the town. Surely something must be waiting for such a feast in the current below, and after watching for a time two or three rises were seen below a second bridge just above a dam. Leave to go down in a boat below the bridge was obtained from no less a person than the Secretary General of the Geneva governing authority, and down I went the next evening to station myself below where the fish had been seen. The difficulty lay in marking a rise in such a wide expanse of water, and in stalking in a boat within shot, for the current was strong and it was impossible to anchor in the right place without first getting too far upstream and near the fish, and so putting him down. That night three fish were risen, but I was too quick for the real monster and only caught the smallest of the three (one and a half pounds), landed in view of a large crowd on all the bridges. I believe that is the first and last trout that has ever been caught actually in the town of Geneva with a dry fly.

## *Fishing*

The trout of the lake and of the clear portion of the Rhone are coloured like a sea trout, but with their backs painted a pale green. A number of large specimens are caught in nets in the lake, particularly in the winter, and provide the second course at official dinners, when their flesh looks and tastes like that of a kelt at its most keltish moment.

Once at a meeting of the League Council the date of the next session was being discussed: should it be in the first week of June or some weeks earlier. There appeared to be a preference among members of the Secretariat for the earlier date, and M. Aristide Briand asked the Secretary General in a whisper for the reason. His old face lit up at the answer, there was a murmured 'Ooh, je vois!' and his right arm went through the motions of casting a fly at his fellow delegates. He at once produced some important political reason why the Council should not meet in the first week of June, but if my memory is correct he was defeated—and our May-fly season was interrupted, against M. Briand's better judgment.

Those who think of visiting Geneva for the purpose of fishing must be prepared to share their sport with many others, who, whatever bait they may use, are keen sportsmen and pleasant companions on the bank; they must, moreover, be ready to look upon blank days as the common lot of man, and upon a brace of trout as a rare gift from the gods.

## BEAGLING

IT WAS no doubt a mad scheme to start a pack of beagles at Geneva, but in the matter of sport, if not in other things, Englishmen *are* mad. The authorities of Geneva viewed the idea with some suspicion, and the general opinion in the neighbourhood appeared to be that a pack of hounds would range the country far and wide, eating up everything they came across—babies included. Shortly after the pack was installed three or four miles from the town, the old gardener of the place, who had conservative views and did not welcome this new-fangled idea of hounds, got up a petition for their instant removal, signed by numbers of people living in some cases at a distance of ten miles, on the ground that sleep was impossible within that radius. Of course there were some just causes for complaint. A neighbouring lady accused the hounds of killing three chickens, and Crees, who acted as kennel huntsman, walked back to her house with her explaining politely but emphatically that the pack was so strictly trained against feather that the thing was impossible. As they reached her doorstep together, round the corner at full gallop came a beagle puppy carrying one of the fowls in its mouth to lay it at their feet. I am glad to say that the lady saw the humour of the situation. The local *chasseur*, whose habit it is to take out one or two hounds and a gun when in pursuit of hares, had never seen a pack, and imagined that such numbers of hounds would at once destroy all game ; the idea of hunting without a gun struck him as absurd. The presence of *chasseurs* roaming the country, though of course a terrible draw-back to hunting, saved all the trouble of getting leave from farmers, since they were perfectly accustomed to people crossing their land in a country where shooting is free except for the annual licence.



## *Beagling*

About one thousand shooting licences are taken out annually in Geneva alone, and, no doubt partly to encourage this, the authorities turn out a limited number of hares each year in January, after the shooting season is over. This loosing of the hares is conducted with considerable ceremony and always receives notices in the press describing the condition of the animals, the manner in which they gallop away, how 'jacks' and 'does' hold their ears as they do so, etc. A hare in that country is regarded much as we regard a stag, and when killed is never referred to merely as 'a hare,' but as a 'hare weighing  $5\frac{3}{4}$  lbs.' or whatever it may be. In the same way a fox is announced as a fox worth so many francs : one *chasseur* informed me with regret that he had just *missed* a fox worth 40 francs. With all these sportsmen and their excessively deadly method of going out at dawn with two or three hounds, whose noses are often excellent, to hunt up to a hare and then by cutting the corners get a shot at her, the stock is naturally reduced to next to nothing in the first few days of the season. A few hares survive for a time in the vines, where no hunting is allowed till the grapes are picked in October, but their turn comes in the end and by Christmas hardly any are left except in a few forbidden gardens round the town. Owing to the fact that a fox is not considered worth shooting for his coat till November and that both earths and long field drains abound, foxes hold their own better than hares and it is not considered necessary or advisable to turn them out.

I once unwittingly interfered with this 'repeopling of the chase,' as it is called. It was a snowy morning, and with the hounds in a van, attached to the rear half of a Ford car, I was driving down a road in France with my head over the side watching for tracks. Crossing the road was the fresh track of what in other countries I should have called a rabbit, but there are no rabbits in the district of Geneva, and I therefore imagined that it must be a leveret. There is a rule against hunting



60. CREES AND THE HOUNDS

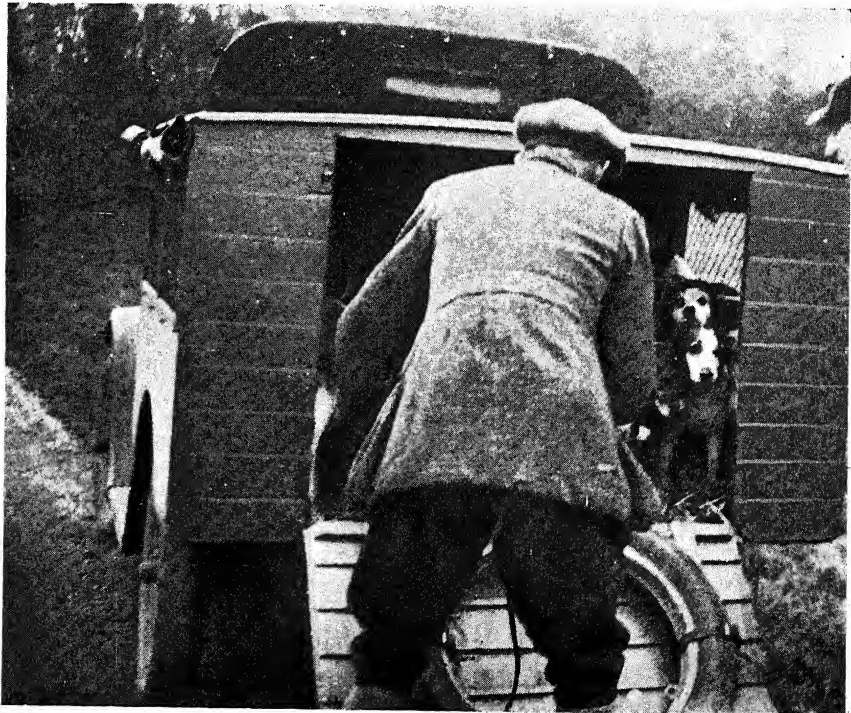


*M. Sanasen*

61. DOWN THE SIDE OF THE COVERT



62. TINKLE WITH BEAGLE PUPPIES



63. THE HOUND VAN.

*M. Sanasen*

in the snow so that I had no wish to be seen letting out the hounds, and leaving the car I investigated the tracks, which after winding about over a field led to a bank : there in a form in the snow I caught sight of a small portion of the animal. That was too much for my conscience, and as soon as the road was clear I determined to let out the hounds and put her up, but, in the meantime, first a lorry containing inquisitive people arrived and later a *Douanier*, who pointed out the track to me and asked if I did not think the hounds might hunt it. He refused to go away, and eventually I confessed that hunting was my intention, that I knew where the hare was, and that if he liked he could wait and see what happened. Out came the hounds ; we put up the quarry—it *was*, strange to say, a rabbit, and in a hundred yards they caught it. I gave it to the *Douanier*, who against all my instructions for secrecy marched off down the road singing with joy and swinging the rabbit round his head. About three weeks later at the neighbouring Custom House a Frenchman came up to me and said, ‘ Well, there was a lot of trouble about that rabbit, but it has all blown over now.’ ‘ Why ’ I asked ; ‘ what is your connection with the rabbit ? ’ He explained, ‘ I am the secretary of the *Société de Chasse*, and they commissioned me to buy hares to ‘ repeople the chase.’ Hares were too expensive, so I bought twelve rabbits from Czechoslovakia, and drove round in a cart letting them out at intervals ; you drove round just behind me.’ It was lucky that I had driven no further, for I might easily have seen the other eleven little tracks and mopped up all their owners.

I am sorry to have to confess that I got up against the authorities on a number of occasions for infringements of the law, and long and highly official correspondence used to pass from the Geneva authorities to those at Berne, and from Berne to the Secretary General, containing complaints of the awful doings of one of his subordinates, generally described at some length as a gentleman in a peculiar round hat with a peak, and a sporting

## *Beagling*

costume of English make. A witness on one occasion described in great detail the condition of the hunted hare, which he had seen in the distance, as an old doe heavy in young. The evidence on that case filled a large dossier, including reports from legal authorities of international repute.

It would be ridiculous to claim that the sport enjoyed by a few keen individuals, who were willing to be at the meet at dawn in the hope of picking up a line and hunting up to fox or hare, was at all of a high order. Still it was hunting, and now and then, particularly with our usual quarry the fox, we had a really big hunt. Whatever may be said of the sport as such, it led to more weird incidents than are usually enjoyed with hounds. On one occasion a British General, who was whipping in, got into conversation with a farmer, while hounds were casting about in a root-field. The General spent some minutes in explaining, in French that far surpasses the French of most British officers, the whole science of beagling. There was no comment from the farmer until the end of the explanation ; then he looked at the hunting crop, and put the single question, 'Have you lost a cow?' On another day we ran a hare into mangolds, a crop about which there was always a lot of fuss. I sent someone on to ask the farmer at the other end of the field if he objected to the hounds. A literal translation to the answer was yelled back, 'Not a bit, and what's more he says he will stand here, and push a loud cry if he sees the hare.' I was once asked at the French *Douane* if the hounds were for woodcock shooting, and my denial not being accepted, the straw in the van was searched for a gun. The absence of a gun puzzled everybody, particularly the Swiss owner of a château. Hounds had thrown up in the early morning in a vineyard at the bottom of his garden, and I hopped over the fence to cast them across his lawn. A pyjamaed figure appeared on a balcony at an upper window and demanded, 'What are you doing there? Don't you know the law? You are not allowed to *shoot* within two hundred yards of a house.' 'I

haven't got a gun.' 'Not got a gun, Sir? Why not?' That took too much explanation and I cast in the opposite direction and lost the hare. Near the same place on another occasion we ran up to a kitchen garden, where a young lady was at work. A member of the field asked the usual question, 'Have you seen her?' and got the unusual reply, 'Seen her? Seen what?' 'Why, the hare.' 'Oh, the hare; yes, yes, a fine hare—I saw him.' (Hares are all gentlemen on the Continent.) 'Where did he go?' 'Down this path, up that line of potatoes, round the corner,' etc., etc., in great detail. 'How long ago?' Here the lady tried hard to collect her thoughts. 'How long ago? Oh, well, let me see. Yes, it was three weeks.'

The sound of the horn and of hounds running had the same sort of attraction for the inhabitants as in England, but the local sportsmen usually arrived with guns in their hands; in fact one of them apologized to me for being at the wrong corner of the wood, and so failing to shoot the fox as he went away. During a very good woodland hunt on another occasion hounds divided, and three or four couple hunted a badger across a road by a waiting *chasseur* who shot it, and then had a rare fight with the hounds to get hold of his prize. Later in the day he met Crees looking for hounds, and generously offered him the badger to eat, as a thanksgiving for what he described as the best day's sport he had ever had at Geneva. The beagles once found and killed an old badger lying out in a marsh. Badgers are prized as great delicacies by the inhabitants, and so are fox cubs, which are preferred by many to hares, but they turn up their noses at an old dog fox; I turned up mine at all of them, and can therefore give no opinion on the matter. I had always looked upon the tale of the fox and the grapes as a mere fable, but in a vine country like Geneva foxes are said to do a good deal of damage to the grapes, and badgers are even worse offenders. Hounds also occasionally get a taste for grapes and, once they have got it, they will slake

## *Beagling*

their thirst on them at frequent intervals in the day ; this is one of the reasons for the law against hunting in vineyards until the grapes are picked.

One of our difficulties lay in the fact that in order to find in a country where hares are almost non-existent and foxes scarce, it was essential to meet at dawn in order to hit the stale line of fox or hare on their way to lay up for the day. I have personally no objection to getting up early, but when you have to be back at the office for a long day's work after an early rise and a hard morning's beagling, the business becomes exhausting. Moreover, we latterly practically ceased to draw for hares as a waste of time ; instead I stopped an earth or drain overnight myself, and met by it in the hope of picking up the line of a home-coming fox. This was far the best insurance against a blank day, but hunting a fox on foot with beagles is the hardest of work, for there are apt to be few corners to cut and hounds often travel at a great pace. It at least provided that sensation—one of the best in hunting—when after a long slow drag on a stale line you suddenly hear the crash as the music changes and every hound screams when they put him up.

One such hunt is engraved on my memory. We met at the frontier (no frontiers counted for the foxes or for us) and I took hounds along the edge of a big wood near a well-used drain that had been stopped overnight. Only a few hundred yards from the meet, when it was still too dark to see, hounds opened, and entering the wood hunted steadily but slowly into the middle of it. There was only one really good ride, the covert was thick and prickly, and I therefore did my best to keep level with hounds along the ride. After about half an hour the tell-tale crash sounded near me, and they raced all round the huge wood while we struggled to keep within earshot. Then at a check one hound slipped ahead, and for the next half hour I was engaged in that painful business of trying to get the rest of the pack up to him. At last I heard

him turn towards me, and picking them up scuttled down a ride, to lay them on all together right on the back of their fox, who had been taking it easy with the single hound. From then onwards things fairly hummed, and one other follower and myself were lucky to get a cut in as they headed for a point of the wood that jutted towards the open country. I yelled to him that with luck we were going away at last, and I remember now the sight of the pack swinging out into the open and rollicking over a sweet grass field with their heads for the Jura, some four miles away at the other side of the open plain. I blew as hard as my wind would let me, but for the rest of the hunt we two were alone. Over a brook, where, finding no balance left in my body, I dropped in off the rocks and waded deep; up a rise with the tail hounds just in view; down to another brook where the pack were jabbering and jostling as they sprang for the other bank; on past two Frenchmen who had seen the fox *bien fatigué* crossing a plough, and then at last a check by the railway, where for some reason he had done an extraordinary turn. A long cast down the line, a hit, and then on again with the fastnesses of the Jura looming very close and each of our four legs a burden to drag along: another mile of wearied labour and I could run no more. Hounds had slowed down on a field freshly manured, and, as it was clear that we should never catch the fox before he reached the mountains, and once in them it might take two days to recover hounds, I asked my companion if he could get to their heads and stop them. He just managed it and we both sat down and expressed our past and present longings for a horse. It had lasted two and a half hours, and was perhaps the most exhausting hunt I ever had, for two-thirds of it were in thick covert and only enthusiasm had kept us two anywhere near them, when they at last went chiming over the open on a four mile point.

We did once catch a fox fair and square. The day's draw was a river valley with a lot of thick scrub in places, and several earths



## *Beagling*

impossible to stop on either bank. Perched high on one side of the valley was a wood of small dimensions, but with a rare growth of thorn and grass. A stale line was picked up outside, and standing on the top of the bank I heard hounds put up their fox below me, and presently a long-drawn 'Tallyho baick' from the far end of the wood. Would he come away over the plain at the top or sink the valley? I stood still till hounds were heard turning downhill and then plunged for it straight through the thorns. As I emerged on the floor of the valley they were racing in a half circle through the scrub, bending towards me, and came pouring out into the open at my feet with their heads up-stream. I can see them now plunging into the river, and swimming up a pool, speaking as they swam to the line they could wind along the steep bank. With such a scent as that it was a stern chase for any man on foot, and the only thing to do was to plug along the best going with the cry of hounds receding at every step. Then they passed behind a cliff out of sight and out of sound, till I reached the base of the cliff with my terrier 'Tinkle,' who had found the pace too hot and come back to me. As we turned the corner an angry chorus greeted us from a wooded bank across the river. Had they met the local cat, had an old boar crossed their path, or was it at last the real thing? 'Tinkle's' hackles were up and so no doubt were mine as we plunged into the river, and there, rolling down the wooded slope to meet us, was a snarling mass of hounds fighting and jabbering over their first fox. I looked above me up the bank and within twenty yards was an open earth: it had been indeed a near thing. Hounds were so mad with excitement that, as I bore the tattered remains on my back across the river to an open space, the seat of my breeches was seized and worried by teeth that were determined to meet at once in something. The moment when we turned that corner to hear the chorus of the worry will stand out among my hunting memories.

Was it all worth while? I do not know. Some few of us enjoyed

a sprinkling of sport gained with great labour, in a country to which hunting in our sense of the word is a thing unknown. After the last morning of all, when we enjoyed a merry hunt that ended typically enough in a warning to leave forbidden ground, I received a charming letter from one of the regular followers of the hounds. That letter has spent a week at the bottom of a Norwegian river, but coloured and tattered it still remains in my pocket book. I quote two of its sentences. 'I suppose this is the end, and it makes one realize how much we owe to you for keeping alive a bit of England in this foreign land. You have given a faithful company a lot of pleasure, and to me personally perhaps more than the others, for in these early mornings of ours you have taught me to love more and more intimately the woods and fields to which I am still, alas ! something of a stranger.'

We were of course a laughing stock, and so was the hound van, for apart from hunting it was used for all kinds of purposes, including the conveyance of people to and from my house. It fitted on to the Ford car in place of the back seat which was temporarily removed. I originally intended to paint it black, but was warned by a Swiss chauffeur that it would look too much like a 'dead box' and therefore coloured it yellowish brown instead. The wire-netting on its sides gave rise to the idea among passers-by that the inmates were lunatics being taken to the asylum ; others looked upon it as a van for calves or pigs. Sometimes after hunting, when I was late, it was driven straight to the office with the hounds inside it, even in some cases to the door of the Assembly, where it naturally caused a sensation. The car once carried fifteen couple of hounds in the van and in addition five people on the front seat, disposed as follows : the driver, with two on the seat beside him, the fourth sitting on the floor with feet on the step poked out through the open door, and the fifth lying flat along the top of the seat behind the driver's back. The car did not seem to object, and in any case it would have been difficult for it

## *Beagling*

to make more than its normal noise. Distinguished personages have been conveyed in it ; Lord Balfour's and Lord Cecil's long legs were on several occasions tucked up within its wired interior ; wild boars have been brought home in it across the frontier after a successful stalk in the Jura ; official League documents have been hurriedly carried from one office to another. It has been left as a present to a farmer who helped to make life pleasant for me, and will no doubt end its days conveying pigs or chickens to market. And the hounds are hunting in couples to the guns somewhere near Neufchâtel, the property of various *chasseurs*.

If sport was often poor, always uncertain, and practically bloodless, at least we had a hearty laugh and a mighty lot of exercise.

## PIG

THE ONLY result of the late War that I should put down as thoroughly good was the reintroduction of wild pig to places where they had been unknown for many years. My theory of this pleasing invasion is that, when in 1914 troops were moving in every direction through western Germany and the Vosges, the pig were disturbed in large numbers and moved, as they habitually do, upwind. No doubt the prevailing wind was west, and the movement of troops was also mainly in that direction. Then came the trenches which prevented the pig getting back, and moreover all sporting guns in France were taken in and held by the village mayors of France. That gave the pig a chance to multiply, and not till the end of the War could the local sportsmen again turn their attention towards them.

One of the areas repopulated in this way was the Jura, and the best sport to be had near Geneva was, in my opinion, pig stalking with a rifle in the snow. It was the best sport for several reasons. A wild pig is a very interesting animal, and more can be learnt about his habits by tracking than by any other means ; his nose and his ears are of the very finest ; he is a tremendous traveller ; his main home, the fir forests of the Jura mountains, are magnificent in themselves, and give an unrivalled panorama of the Alps. The difficulty of getting even one pig was immense, and there was always the possibility of being arrested for breaking the law, since shooting with a rifle and shooting in the snow are not allowed. They are, however, winked at by many of the authorities.

I was only once actually arrested, and then for the additional offence of stalking a few days after the shooting season had closed in the middle of January. It was a pouring wet day, and, when we returned to our

## *Pig*

motor car left in a farm, an imposing pair of French gendarmes awaited us. I was told to unload and lay down my arms and to come to the police station on foot. The suggestion that the whole party should be given a lift in the car was finally agreed to, for the unfortunate gendarmes had been scouring the mountains for us all day and were beat to the world. Once at the police station a long argument started as to whether they should seize the car as an 'engin de chasse.' We argued that a more useless 'engin' on the steep and trackless sides of the Jura could not be imagined, and our captors used the telephone in our presence to ask the advice of their officer. We could not, unfortunately, catch the voice at the other end of the telephone, but the answers made his remarks so obvious that I give one phase of the conversation from both ends. The officer, 'What sort of chaps are they?' Our captors, 'Oh, not bad at all; they seem people of "assez bonne foi."' This was greeted with roars of laughter from the whole company and the general atmosphere at once improved, so that we were allowed to depart with not only the car but also the rifle, after leaving our address and promising to give our captors a lift to the court thirty miles off, where the case was to be tried. As a matter of fact we never heard another word about it, but I did not feel quite safe in that district again.

Our normal practice was to be at the foot of the Jura by dawn, myself and Crees or some other companion, with 'Tinkle' the terrier on a string. Strangely enough 'Tinkle' though hopelessly gun-shy, loves the sight of a rifle, which she always associates with pig. There are two little paths, one several hundred feet above the other, which run for a considerable distance, maintaining the same altitude through the forest on the French part of the Jura, and the best plan was to mount at once to one of these paths and follow it, looking for tracks, for the practice of the pig is to descend during the night to the chestnuts at the foot of the mountains to feed, and climb again to lie up in the day time in the

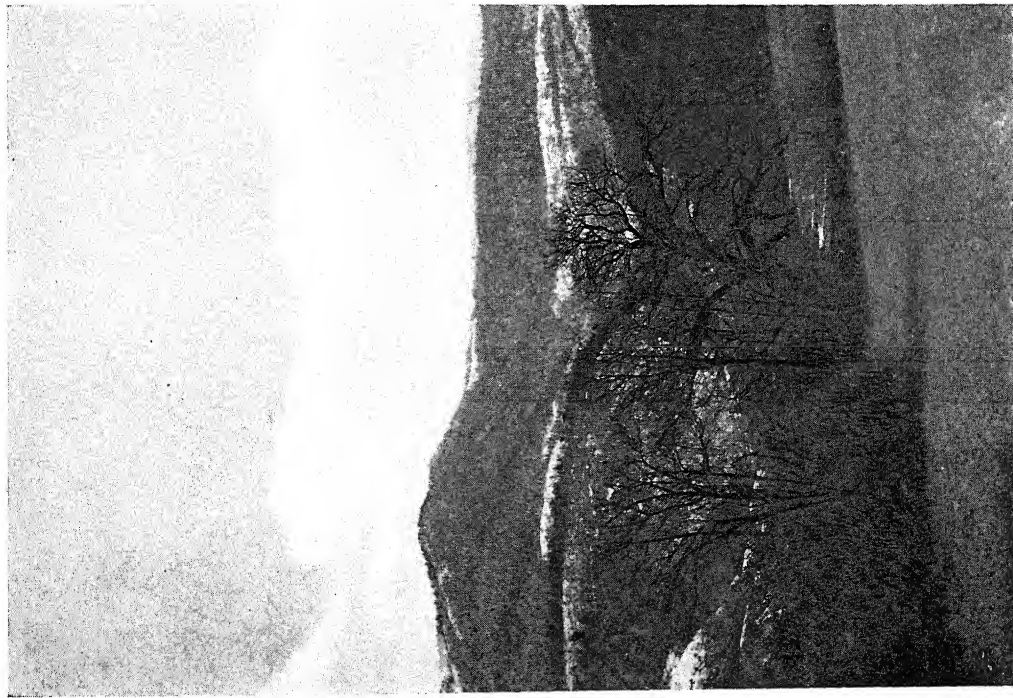
heart of the forest, at an altitude determined by the depth and condition of the snow. As they generally lay up above these paths, there was a good chance of hitting a fresh track of any pig in the district mounting across the path. There were no real rides, the forest was dense pine above, mainly beech and scrub below, and in few places was it possible to see more than fifty yards. The slopes were steep without being dangerous, the going awful, and the difficulty of avoiding snapping twigs, particularly in frosty weather, extreme. But the worst trouble of all was the wind. Even in a real gale from north or south, that is along the line of the mountain, there was no saying which way the draught would be in the hollows and ridges on its sides, and at any moment a gust might suddenly arrive from exactly the reverse direction at a critical moment. Without snow, tracking was very difficult except immediately after heavy rain, for the Jura is very porous and water soaks away underground at once, leaving a dry surface on which little but the 'routlings' can be seen.

One of the most exciting days I had was in a slight covering of snow and a sharp frost. The track of an old 'solitaire' was found crossing the upper of the two paths, and 'Tinkle,' who was kept on a cord like an elk hound, asserted that she could easily hunt the track. We followed it, certain that we were not far behind him, and taking infinite pains to avoid making any unnecessary sound. After mounting a little way the pig had kept level and then turned down again—the usual sign that he meant to lie up—and 'Tinkle' gave an indication that she could wind the animal direct. We were passing through bramble covered in snow, when I saw for a second the great dark beast pass between two bushes, but too quickly for a shot. Perhaps in the excitement we moved forward too fast; at any rate there was a momentary glimpse of a galloping form, and our chances for the day seemed to be over. We followed, however, in the direction he had taken, and after a short distance heard

## *Pig*

a distinct grunt below and behind us ; we sat down to listen in a little clearing. Presently a thoroughly vicious grunt sounded again and two enormous ears appeared over a bush, which completely hid what must have been the father of all the pigs. I was all ready this time, but, with one more challenge, he whipped round back into the scrub. The ground was so frosty and noisy to the foot that it seemed courting disaster to move, and presently more grunts and sounds of the rubbing of heavy bodies against bark issued from the same direction. My hands were so icy that I could hardly grip the rifle, and when at last a rather inferior pig emerged into the open, I shot him at once. Two or three galloping forms were seen for a second as they dashed down-hill, but the monster never showed himself. Our conclusion was that our original quarry, a wandering boar, had winded the herd of sows, and was coming up to them, when we jumped him. As he bolted, the master of the herd had got his wind, and the angry grunt and demonstration, which had nearly cost him his life, had been in protest, not of us, but of the boar we had jumped. If only he had taken just one more step forward, we should have dragged down that hill a heavier burden, with 'Tinkle' as an infuriated brake hanging on to his nose.

I lost, owing to sheer stupidity, another chance at a big boar near the same place the next year. A keen young Siamese sportsman, Mr. Sanasen, was my companion, and in deep soft snow we hit the track of a real monster, that had climbed alone straight up the slope. After a long hard track we came to a fresh bed recently vacated, and, thinking the pig must be close, we made a circuit and came down from above over a little crest. There below us was another freshly scratched-out bed, showing dark on the snow, and in it something darker still. I felt sure that it must be the pig and asked my companion, who believed he could actually see its eye. I sat down at once and took a steady shot into the middle of a large fir bough lying in the empty bed. We followed the tracks on in disgust,



*M. Sanasen*

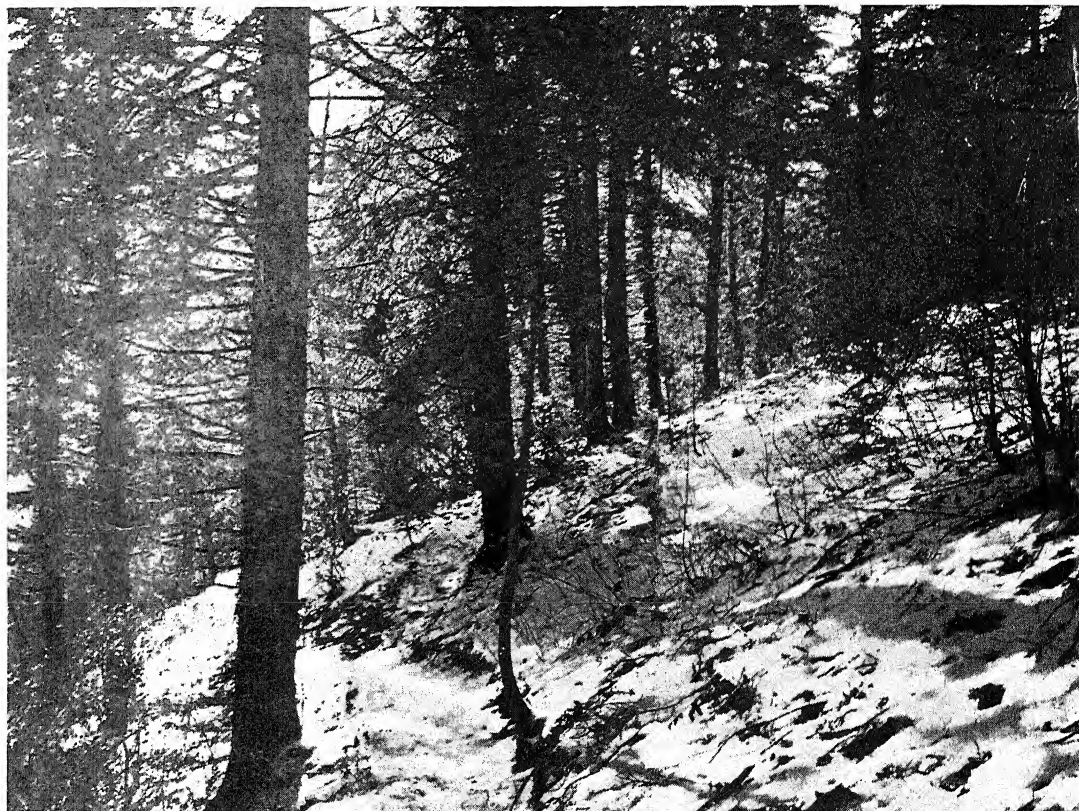
64. PIG COUNTRY



*M. Sanasen*

65. MYSELF AFTER PIG





66. THE PATH THROUGH THE JURA FOREST

*M. Sanasen*

and found that the real pig had sprung at the shot from a third bed, about one hundred yards above us. How he would have laughed, if he had watched the steady shot at his empty bed !

Really heavy snow and hard frost drove the pig down to the plain and on one or two occasions they and I met in the open. One early morning Crees and I discovered fresh tracks of a herd leaving a wood just over the French border, and pointing straight for Geneva. Tracking was easy, and we made quick time from France into Switzerland and over the open plain, getting closer and closer to the outskirts of the town. At last the tracks led into a small thick oak wood, only a few hundred yards from the houses in Sacconex, one of the suburbs of Geneva, and a circuit of the wood proved that the pig were undoubtedly in one corner of it. I sat where I could command the only ride, and one open side of the wood facing away from the houses, for it seemed unlikely that they would break covert towards the town. Crees then went into the scrub on the tracks, and as his foot cracked the first twig there was a general stampede and a yell from 'Tinkle,' who charged towards the sound. Unluckily, contrary to our expectation, they left towards the town, and though I ran on the chance of cutting them off, we only got a sight of them galloping in a string of fourteen across the plain, and back into a larger wood. I hurried off to the office, begged and received special leave for such an occasion, and returned in the car to circle the wood we had seen them enter in the early morning. The tracks were found leading out of the wood, and back into a small spinney on the frontier, and on the tracks was a Frenchman. There was not a moment to lose and we flew in the car round to a point on the road near the spinney, where I leapt out and ran through the snow in the hope of a shot at the pig, which, I felt sure, would be moved by the Frenchman in a few moments, if indeed they were still in the spinney. As I ran, the pig emerged from the spinney heading in my direction, but the next moment they swerved, having

## Pig

probably obtained a whiff of my wind. The shot was a possible one, but I was blown and they were galloping hard ; at any rate the result was a clean miss. I raced for the car, and we charged the frontier post, screaming to the *Douanier* not to stop us. Fortunately he was a sportsman, and his only remark was, ' C'est les sangliers ? C'est bien les sangliers ? Allez donc ' : and we flew past. The pig were heading for the Jura, and several miles of open plain with only a few small woods lay before them, so that there was yet a chance of cutting them off by using the car, if only the roads would serve. I drove with one eye on the road, and the other searching for dark galloping forms, while Crees scanned the snow for tracks. We came upon the tracks after a mile or so, and bundling out, followed them over a stream to find an excited farmer leaving his horses, and racing to his house for a gun. Unluckily he had turned the pig, who had recrossed the road in our absence by our empty car. No road now ran in the direction of their tracks, and we followed on foot in company with yet another *chasseur* who had turned up from somewhere, and found that our quarry had entered a large osier bed, where it was highly likely they would linger to get their wind. Light was failing and there was little time to make elaborate plans ; I therefore selected a possible place, and instructed Crees to follow the tracks. Naturally enough, however, the pig, who had indeed stopped in the osiers, broke covert at exactly the opposite corner to where I was posted, and there was no light left to follow them further. It had been a great international hunt over France and Switzerland, and with just a spice of luck we should certainly have got one.

In 1931 there was heavy snow in February, and, though hunting was barred to me in the best area in France, a special pig permit was duly obtained giving me leave to hunt in the Canton of Vaux. Every *chasseur* in the district was after the pig, and employed scouts to locate them, preparatory to a ' battue ' with all the guns that could be collected. Nothing

bores me more than a ' battue ' and my practice was always to search for tracks on my own, either on foot in the Jura or from the car along the roads in the plain. One morning we found from the car the tracks of two herds crossing the road ; the first herd had gone back into France but the second were pointing north into Vaux, and, driving on in the car, we hit the tracks again over a lane. Making another cast forward we found the track of a single pig that had come up to the road but had turned back, and, by completing the circle in the car, we proved that he was in a comparatively small area, containing no covert but two little copses and a few rough fences. Leaving the car, Crees and I with ' Tinkle ' set out on the track, Crees sticking closely to it, while I kept parallel fifty yards up-wind. In this position we passed on either side of an overgrown fence, but on reaching the end of the field Crees signalled to me that the tracks turned back. I knew that I had not crossed them, so that everything pointed to the pig being in the fence and somewhere between us, although there seemed insufficient covert to conceal anything larger than a hare. We turned back along opposite sides of the fence and not ten yards from it. As we reached the end of it there was a scramble in the leaves, and up jumped the pig between us. For the moment I dared not shoot, but he dashed back down the fence and I fired at him twice, dodging between the stems and through the scrub, and then running through the snow I got a third galloping chance as he crossed the open, with 'Tinkle' in hot pursuit. By some lucky fluke the bullet got him in the back of the head, and, before we had dragged our prize to the car, every inhabitant in the district seemed to spring up from nowhere to gloat over our success. The hunt had made me slightly late for my work, and I changed on the spot and drove straight to the League Office; with the pig strapped on to the back of the car. The very next morning an excellent chance was spoilt by the local pig scout, who refused to believe my story, corroborated by a circle in the car, that a herd of nine pig were

## Pig

only just ahead in a circumscribed area of the plain, with nothing on it but a few fences. This idiot, against my violent protests, blundered on his skis straight on to the herd in the open plain. By running I did get three long shots, and no doubt ought to have killed a pig, but without this interloper's interference we should certainly have had a quiet stalk in open country, and a good chance of a steady shot. Shortly afterwards a protest came in from other local *chasseurs*, who are distinctly jealous of foreigners sharing in their sport, and my one success in Vaux led to the withdrawal of my permit to shoot with a rifle.

Pig stalking at Geneva was not by any means a deadly form of sport, for if you got one pig a year you did pretty well, but it was really scientific tracking, hard exercise, and extremely interesting, for everything the animal did was clearly written in the snow.

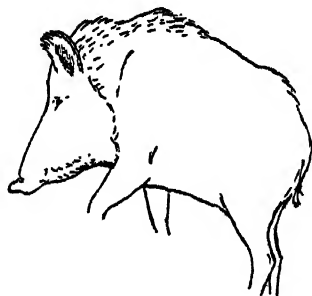
My belief is that a pig's life is dictated almost entirely by his nose. He is never happy unless that organ is pointing up-wind, and being a great wanderer he moves tremendous distances at night and sometimes also by day, always according to the direction of the wind. His mud bath, and subsequent scratching of his back against a rough barked tree, are probably the pleasantest moments of his day, usually enjoyed just before he lies up after dawn. The springs and holes where mud baths could be obtained in the Jura were not very frequent, but near them could always be found some old fir tree from which the bark had been completely removed by the scratching pig.

The best authority on pig, and the best *chasseur* in the district, was the owner of the inn at Thoiry, where the famous Briand-Stresemann lunch took place. This man got most of his pig by sitting up at night near a chestnut tree, a cold amusement in which I never participated. There was also a young French farmer, who, in 1931, was very successful with two Irish terriers. These dogs used to seize a pig by the ear, and hold it, thereby often making it impossible to shoot, but on such

## *Pig*

occasions the farmer several times ran in and used his knife, and actually succeeded in lassoing unhurt, and bringing home to his farm, several pig that had been seized by his terriers. Once, when they tackled an old boar, one of the terriers got a nasty rip from his tusk, but I saw the dog afterwards, when its wound had completely healed.

The reintroduction of pig to Switzerland as a result of the Great War was preceded, it is said, by a similar reintroduction as a result of the Franco-Prussian War. They were then gradually exterminated, but it is to be hoped that the present stock will, despite a certain amount of damage to potatoes, remain to add yet another attraction to the wild dark forests that give the charm to Jura's slopes.



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